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THE BLACK PEARL

THE BLACK PEARL.

Comme le fil de soie qui relie les perles
d'un collier, l'Ego, à travers les Ages,
passe en des vies successives, heureuses
ou tristes, criminelles ou vertueuses dans
son long Pèlerinage vers la Perfection.

With grateful thanks to M— W— for
having translated into English the story
of Jeanne and her struggle "Vers la
Lumière."





THE BEGUM

1600

(From an old miniature)

BERTHE MOUCHETTE

The Black Pearl

By

NOEL AIMIR

George Robertson & Company

Propty. Ltd.,

Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and Brisbane.

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Annex

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A
MADAME BARR SMITH,
Hommage respectueux de gratitude et
d'affection.

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PART I.

I

At
Gwylata

Heureux qui comme Ulysse, a fait
un beau voyage.

DU BELLAY.



A terrific noise makes me jump from my chair, a confused uproar of grating wheels, horse-hoofs, the barking of dogs and the cracking of whips.

"The coach, Jeanne, with your luggage," says my uncle.

I run to the verandah to see this relic of by-gone days.

A true *Diligence* like those in the engravings of the 18th century, painted in canary yellow and emerald green, picked out with black and red.

This funny vehicle is bringing my boxes, containing all I possess in the world, my favourite books and the presents of my Parisian school-mates whom I left in tears at the idea of my departure for the antipodes—"a country of kangaroos and savages, where I would surely be eaten alive," they sobbed.

"What a contrast to the 'Brasier' motor in which you drove me here yesterday, uncle," I exclaim.

"That is Australia, little one, the two extremes. Yesterday a motor, to-day the old coach which carries letters to far-off bush homes, among them probably some from the

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Old World by the Messageries Boat on which you were a passenger."

By what strange circumstance does a little Parisienne find herself in the midst of the Australian bush?

For the very simple reason that my guardian, Mr. Deslandes, is the happy owner of a big station, Gwylata, on the banks of Lake Alexandrina, in South Australia. "L'oncle aux millions," as my school-mates used to call him, whose arrival in Paris was the signal for a short but intoxicating whirl of pleasure when the head of the little orphan was somewhat turned with boxes at the "Opera," at the "Comédie Française," suppers in "chic restaurants," visits to grands couturiers, where I found myself the delighted possessor of frocks very much too smart for a school girl, and one never-to-be-forgotten time—a delirious fortnight at Cannes and Monte-Carlo.

"Come, come, little girl; breakfast will be quite cold," calls my uncle. I glance at my precious luggage, piled up on the verandah, as the big lumbering vehicle starts noisily on its journey.

Unfortunately, in returning to my seat I indulge in a "pirouette," to the intense astonishment of an old servant, who nearly lets fall a tray as she glares disapprovingly at me.

"Well, Meg, says my uncle; you have come

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for your mistress' breakfast. Has she an appetite this morning?"

Taking up the laden tray, the old woman throws me a spiteful glance, and mutters between her teeth, "French dancing girl!"

Perhaps it is just as well that my uncle is a trifle deaf, the dear man, and does not hear the remark.

"Now you have seen the real mistress of Gwylata, Jeannette, 'Old Meg,' who directs everything here and holds us in 'the path of virtue' with an iron hand—Meg, your aunt's faithful maid for thirty years, and now the right hand of Molly, who has given the reins into her hands completely.

"She abuses the confidence"; I say it with conviction.

"Oh, no! Under a thorny exterior there beats a kind and devoted heart. She would suffer martyrdom herself and sacrifice everybody for Molly, and, above all, for Hector."

The Reverend Hector Armstrong is the son of my aunt by a former marriage, and inherits her religious feeling (for she is awfully pious, my dear Aunt Molly, I have heard). In charge of the Murray mission, he has established his headquarters at Gwylata and thrown himself into the heroic task of saving the souls of the benighted settlers scattered along the course of the great Australian waterway.

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My eighteenth birthday ! My aunt has just asked for me. I find her in the little morning room, where, reclining on a lounge, she passes the greater part of her days.

After some affectionate inquiries about my comfort, she says :

"I want to give you a black pearl which I have been keeping in trust. It belonged to your mother, and will have a double interest for you when you know its history. I have had it attached as a pendant to a string of pearls of my own, which will look much better on your white neck than in my casket."

I open the box which she hands me, and cannot repress an exclamation of wonder and admiration. In it lies a necklace composed of exquisite pearls, some white and milky, others gleaming opalesquely in tints merging from grey to rose.

But the gem of the collection is the pendant—a black pearl as large as an olive, and perfect in form and lustre.

"Oh, aunt ! It is fit for a queen !"

"My dear child," she resumes with her delicate melancholy smile, "I have no daughter to wear them. Pearls are feminine, it is said, and want light, heat and the magnetism of soft, warm flesh, or they lose their colour and die."

"Then I'll wear them every day," I return, kissing her.

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"This black pearl belonged to a Begum," adds my uncle, who had entered a few minutes before. "It belongs to you now by right as the descendant of the Hindoo princess. It is the only souvenir which remained to your mother of her great ancestress, the Begum Jeanne, wife of Dupleix, from whom she was so proud to have descended. You are named after her, Jeanne."

I take the necklace into my own room, and gaze at it long, thinking of the woman whose memory has been treasured so carefully in our family. When quite a child I loved to hear my mother recount the exploits of the famous Dupleix, his fighting in India, his disappointment and despair when abandoned by all save the Begum, the intrepid companion, whose confidence and devotion lightened his darkest hours.

Is this strain of Hindoo blood in my veins responsible for the anomalies of my character, for the struggle which sometimes ensues between totally dissimilar qualities of my being? The dreamy disposition of the Oriental mingled with the vivacity of the French-woman; the love of light, flowers and perfumes; the desire of being loved and caressed which made me spend whole hours in my mother's lap, the need of devoting myself to someone or something; the keen suffering I

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experience when I find myself in a chilly atmosphere of indifference. Is all this simply atavism, the Indian princess living again in the Frenchwoman of the twentieth century?

It's a little soon to express an opinion, but I believe I shall like this Australian life, all liberty, sunshine and fresh air. How amusing are its contrasts of primitive simplicity and old-world elegance, superimposed upon a solid background of English custom! Wherever on our planet two or three Englishmen have planted their flag, it becomes immediately a little corner of Old England—the same customs, same food, same dress despite the differences of climate. In the unconscious pride underlying the belief that all customs are perfect because they are English, there is betrayed a certain strength of character and will which refuses to be influenced by environment. Sometimes it is pushed to extremes and becomes exceedingly funny.

Last Monday, Daisy, the daughter of the intendant—manager, as he is termed here—took me to Wellington in her dog-cart, a smart little turnout which she drives in dashing style. (I shall certainly have to learn to ride and drive.)

We had to make purchases at the "Store," where everything is stocked, from a morsel of cheese to a flamboyant hat.

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On the road, I remarked a cottage where the wife was doing the family washing, hanging the clothes on ropes suspended between gum trees, which apparently serve many purposes. A little further on was another cottage and another washing display. Arrived in the township we saw every back yard decorated with sheets, shirts and various small things, white, blue and red, waving gracefully at the will of the summer wind.

"What a coincidence!" I murmured, wondering, to Daisy.

"But," said she, quite simply, "it's Monday, isn't it?"

"You don't mean that Monday is dedicated to washing as Sunday to rest?"

"Certainly. There would be a fine to-do with the servants if a mistress wanted them to wash on any other day. She would be regarded as eccentric and suspected of all sorts of misdemeanours.

I could not help laughing at the idea of all the clean linen of Australia hanging on the line at the same hour of the same day throughout the Continent.

"If the inhabitants of Mars could see us, Daisy, this sudden white blossoming might well puzzle them. I am sure that a Martian savant ere this has discovered the cause, and

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explained it as a ceremony celebrated in honour of our satellite.

Despite my laughter, there remained at the back of my consciousness a certain admiration for the sentiment of order and voluntary submission to established custom—the only domination these independent people will acknowledge.

II

The Reverend Hector

Qu'on vante en lui la foi, l'honneur, la
probité

Qu'on prise sa candeur et sa civilité

Qu'il soit doux, complaisant, officieux,
sincère,

On le veut, j'y soucris . . .

BOILEAU.

Oh, dear ! How well I understand the feelings of the Athenian who voted for the banishment of Aristides. The poor man was so tired of hearing him called "The Just" that he must have welcomed this means of getting rid of him.

Not that I wish to exile the Reverend Hector.

For one thing, it would not be of any use. Absence does not stop the everlasting pæan of praise, for as it is, he is scarcely ever at home.

He has not returned from the mission station since my arrival, consequently I know him only by reputation.

But what a reputation !

From my aunt I can understand it.

She is his mother.

From Meg, too, who assumes a beatified expression when his name is mentioned. She is his old nurse.

She actually *smiled* this morning—I underline the word three times—when Mrs. Deslandes told her to prepare her son's room.

He is coming to spend Sunday here at the station.

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But why should my uncle join in the daily litany of the Saint of Gwylata? or Mac, the old boundary-rider, who is teaching me to ride, and who, by way of encouragement I suppose, recounts the perilous equestrian feats of "Master Hector."

He has all the talents, it seems—this young man—secular, as well as ecclesiastical.

The dining-room is decorated with trophies won at Oxford, either in sport or scholarship. He is a clergyman of the new school of muscular Christianity, and believes in developing the bodies of his parishioners equally with their souls.

Twenty times a day I hear: "Hector says this—. Hector does that—. Hector will teach you all about the English Poets, he is so well-read."

It certainly is a fact that I am woefully ignorant of English literature. I really couldn't say whether Chaucer and Shelley were contemporaries or not. I have a vague idea of Tennyson and Longfellow because we used to read them at the Lycee. I except Shakespeare; of course *he* is universal, like our Molière.

To return to our paragon of perfection. Let me whisper the astounding truth: The name of the Reverend Hector is getting on my nerves.

I long to go and shout this phrase to the

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reeds on the lake. . . . But it is really too horrid to venture forth—108 degrees in the shade, *in the shade, mind*. Imagine it, and tell me if the effort would not be altogether too violent for the state of limpness and deliquescence to which the temperature has reduced me.

As an alternative, I take my water-colours and begin a fancy sketch of the much-lauded hero. I can't get any help from the photograph in my aunt's bedroom, taken when he was five years old.

My colouring is a bit crude, especially in the hair, where the soft Venetian red runs to the unmistakable hue of carrots. . . . Still, I am not altogether unsatisfied with my maiden effort in the art of portraiture.

I have never before felt the least inclination to devote my energies to the "Arts d'Agréments," as we call them in France—"agrément?" For whom is the "pleasure?"

For the unhappy victim condemned to torture a long-suffering piano for four solid hours a day, or spoil nice clean white paper and canvas?

"Oh'que c'est beau la toile blanche," as one of our decadent poets remarked when returning from the Salon. Perhaps the "pleasure" is for those still greater unfortunates who have

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to admire the works of the embryo artist, or listen to the exercises of the future Paderewski.

"Arts d' Agréments" indeed! Truly language was given to man to conceal his thoughts!"

During these profound reflections the portrait is completed. The long Roman nose indicates firmness of will (I have exaggerated the length a little). The eyes, turned heavenward—only the whites are visible—betray his angelic soul. The long legs clad in riding breeches and gaiters suggest his equestrian prowess, and a tiny, tiny bishop's apron hints at the recompense due to his saintly and evangelical virtues.

In one hand he waves triumphantly a Bible, in the other a tennis racket.

Only two hands! How unfortunate! I want several (like a Hindoo God) to symbolise his many attributes.

Now let me add two little wings, and around his neck a chaplet of hearts on which to inscribe the names of his admirers—just a wee one to be left blank for mine.

While I contemplate this charming production of budding genius, Mr. Deslandes enters my little sitting-room, to which he has admission at all times.

I hand him my masterpiece without a word.

He laughs until the tears run down his

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cheeks, and wants to carry it off to show his wife.

"No, no, uncle, I beseech you. She might take it seriously, forgetting that it's only a joke. I would not wound her feelings for the world; we are beginning to get on so nicely together."

.
I have found out a way of being useful.

When my aunt is racked with neuralgia, I go and sit with her for an hour or two. My hand on her forehead soothes the pain.

How strange is that healing force which emanates unconsciously from some people!

It tires me a little sometimes, but a good walk, or better still, a ride accompanied by Mac, who won't trust me alone on horseback yet, restores me.

They used to tease me at school about what they called my "magnetism," which had a soothing effect on the sourest and most crabbed disposition. A gift not always without drawbacks, for on how many disagreeable missions was I not sent to placate a furious teacher—the old Fraulein, especially, who, because she was German, was always on the look out for slights, and distributed impositions right and left. To me only did she unbend. Perhaps a fellow-feeling drew us together, for

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was not the little orphan an exile from family life as she from her country?

I have tried to exercise my "powers" on Meg, but so far without success. The austere daughter of Scottish Puritans cannot stand my French ways. Even my dresses offend her, so my aunt tells me laughingly.

She cannot understand how a well brought up "young leddy" can come down to breakfast indecently clad in a "bed-goon," as she designates my pretty peignoir of soft surah, trimmed with Valenciennes, a chef d'oeuvre of Laferrière.

Nevertheless, I am not going to lace myself stiffly all day in this hot-house sort of temperature just to please her offended prejudice. Besides, I love loose, flowing draperies, the soft swish of silken materials, and their graceful billowy folds. (The little Hindoo Princess peeping out, I suppose.)

But Meg's antagonism worries me a little. I have as much need of affection as of air. Dislike, even indifference, causes me real physical suffering.

Every day I mount "Jenny," a knowing old mare, who permits herself no liberties with my inexperience.

My riding-master is old Mac—MacMahon—to give him his rightful cognomen. Is he a

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distant cousin of the famous "Maréchal," I wonder? The bush conceals many family secrets in its bosom.

Mac was once a boundary-rider, as those men are termed who pass their lives in the saddle, inspecting paddocks and runs, recovering strayed stock, and keeping the station generally in order. Too enfeebled by age—and whisky—to be of any great use now, my uncle, in the kindness of his heart, keeps him on without any defined duties. He still rides marvellously, and in lesson hours his bearing is most rigidly correct towards his "Miss Mam'selle," as he calls me. Mademoiselle quite alone strikes him as too familiar.

It is one of my greatest delights to get him to talk during our rides. He is a perfect mine of information on the early days of the colony, the goldfields of Victoria, and the bush-rangers.

Under the seal of secrecy, he has actually confessed that he himself belonged to the famous Kelly Gang; and he calmly relates the most blood-curdling yarns of pillage of stations, banks held up, and furious rides to escape capture.

Sometimes I rather suspect him of imposing on my credulity—"pulling my leg," as I heard one of the station hands say one day. Of course that is "slang," and I must not use

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such naughty expressions; but Australian slang has for me a great fascination. There is always a decided twinkle in Mac's small, shrewd blue eyes as he piles horror on horrors. It amuses us both, and I respond by marvelous stories of the Old World, which he left when a child, and still dreams of seeing again.

Mac knows also many of the legends of the black tribes, and when he has sufficiently scared me with the exploits of Captain Starlight, he relates the legend of the Pleiades—Mea-Mei—in the aboriginal tongue, and stories about the Bunyip, which are told to the picaninnies to make them good.

III

The Dream

Notre âme lorsque le corps dort
reçoit participation insigne de sa prime
et divine origine et en contemplation de
cette infinie sphere à laquelle rien
n'advient, rien ne passe, rien ne déchet,
tous temps sont présens, note non seule-
ment les choses passées en mouvemens in-
ferieurs, mais aussi les futures.

RABELAIS (Pantagruel hv. ii. ch. xiii.).

I have had a strange dream wherein, by a sort of dual personality, I beheld myself smaller and slimmer. My hands and feet were adorned with heavy jewels. Rose-coloured silken draperies were wound round my supple body. Precious gems gleamed on my brow and neck. Reclining upon cushions in a room of white marble, I was gazing through a wide archway which gave on to a colonnade. Tall palms bent their sombre tufted heads and plantains waved their pale green leaves in the breeze. Birds of brilliant plumage hovered over flowers of dazzling splendour. Ideas, new to me, but which I felt were of remote antiquity, surged through my brain, the mentality of which seemed extraordinarily increased. I was expecting some one. The violence of my feelings frightened me. Passionate and eager, my heart was yet full of anguish, even horror.

A man entered the room, clad in rich draperies of silk and velvet, embroidered with gold, a turban fastened with a diamond aigrette covered his black hair.

Dismissing the women around me with a slight gesture, he threw himself at my feet.

His musical, softly-cadenced voice mur-

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mured words which only my other self understood. I felt for him the fear mingled with the attraction and admiration that one feels for a beautiful tiger, or for one of those glittering jewelled snakes of India.

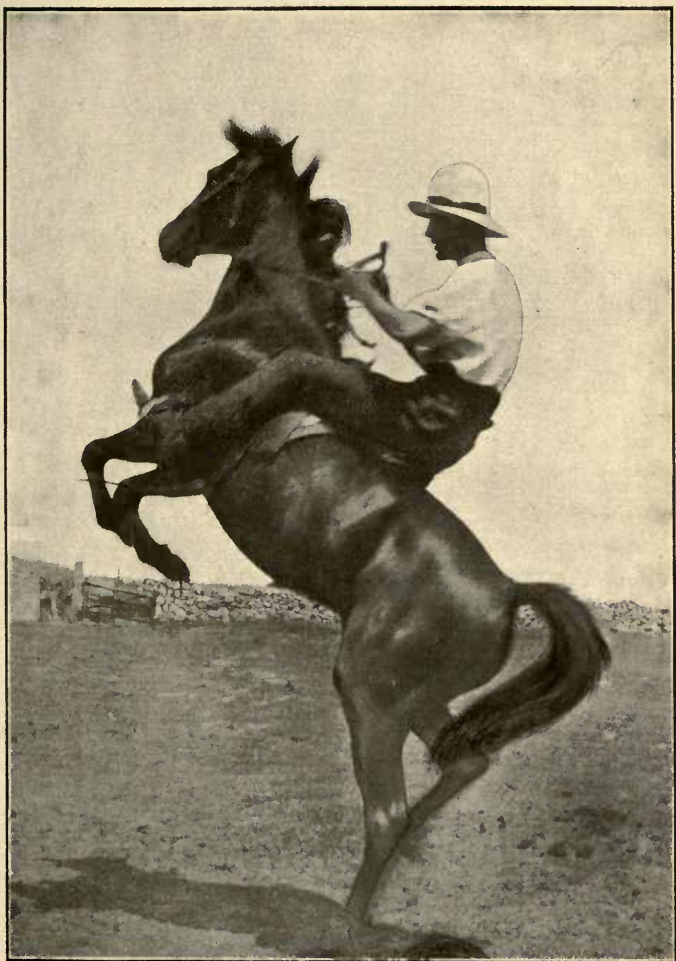
He drew from his bosom a necklace of black pearls and clasped it around my neck. His eyes, with their pupils dilated, were fixed upon me like those of a bird of prey.

Trembling and fascinated, I swayed towards him, when a man with clear-cut, ascetic features stood between us. The loose sleeve of his monk's habit fell back as he raised a Crucifix menacingly towards us. I made a brusque movement to separate the two men, and awoke.

My hand was clenched convulsively on the Begum's black pearl, and the unclasped necklace hung over the edge of the bed.

Next morning I recounted the dream to my uncle, who listened attentively.

"It is really very curious, Jeanne, because that particular pearl once belonged to the wife of a Rajah. Widowed early, and converted to Christianity by one of our missionaries, she took refuge in a convent at Madras, in order to escape the unwelcome attentions of her husband's successor. The story goes that she had not always been thus obdurate to his advances, but yielding to the thought of the dishonour attached to a wife faithless to her husband's



HECTOR "HORSEBREAKING."

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memory—there are no “Merry Widows” in India—she fled one day, taking her daughter with her.”

“What did the new Rajah do?”

“Nothing. He dared not brave the religious prejudices of his people.”

“And what became of the child?”

“She remained with her mother at the convent, and was brought up in the Christian faith. Later on she married a French doctor and became the mother of Jeanne, who afterwards married our great Dupleix. Don’t you remember how, profiting by her relationship with certain Hindoo Princes, Jeanne procured some important alliances for her husband to the benefit of French rule in India?”

“I remember. And didn’t she sell her jewels to help pay his army when funds did not arrive from France?”

“Yes. Louis XV. preferred to lavish money on his favourites rather than pay the soldiers who fought for him. However, the Begum kept a few pearls of the necklace so famous throughout India, and they were divided between her descendants and kept as precious heirlooms.”

“Then, this black pearl of mine——”

“Is one of them. And the Hindoo Princess of the dream was probably your ancestress.”

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"No, uncle, not an ancestress; for she was really—I—I can't explain. It is too subtle, but I can feel it."

My uncle laughs.

"The apostles of re-incarnation, that old doctrine, so much in vogue just now, would say that the Princess of Mysore has re-incarnated in my little Jeannette. That would explain," placing his hand affectionately on my shoulder, "the big velvety eyes and exotic grace of our dear little girl."

I kiss him to stop further utterance.

"But, dear uncle, who then——"

I stop short, blushing and finishing the sentence in my thoughts only—"Who, then, is the Rajah?"

Happily, my uncle attributes my flushed cheeks to his compliment.

IV

Cousins

On s'approche, on sourit, la main touche
la main.

MUSSET.

The Reverend Hector has arrived. Like Caesar (Caesar or Hector, it is all one), he has conquered and attached me to his chariot.

How was the conquest made? Very simply! After dinner I went on the verandah overlooking the lake to wait for the moonrise, and also to let my aunt receive her son whom Mac has driven from Wellington.

I never tire of this Australian landscape by moonlight. Grey and monotonous in the crude sunlight, it becomes, under the witchery of the moon, poetic, even majestic. The gigantic trees, with their twisted branches and gnarled trunks detached against the sombre background of sapphire, recall the weird eerie effects of Gustave Doré.

A man's voice, with musical tones in it, startles me from my dreamy contemplation.

"I see," says the Rev. Hector, for it is he, "that we share a common taste—a love for our beautiful Australian nights."

"Nature is closer to us here, and penetrates us more deeply with her primitive forces."

"That radiant moon rises on a world of youth and strength. Here the conventions of the world seem paltry. Will you forget them, Mademoiselle, and begin as we are sure to

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end? Since I am your aunt's son, will you treat me as a cousin?"

I accept the outstretched hand, and return his friendly clasp. I do not know, if it is so with every one, but the hand, especially the manner in which it gives and returns a clasp, is for me a sure index to the personality of the owner.

My cousin's grip is hearty, strong, and "sympatica," as the Italians say—a word which conveys many shades of meaning too subtle to express. It inspires me with confidence, and imparts an assurance of devotion, strength and unswerving loyalty.

"Little cousin," he resumes, "permit me to say how glad I am to see you at Gwylata. The house is quite transformed, my mother ten years younger, and Mac almost a reformed character, thanks to the influence of his 'Miss Mamselle.'"

"Oh, Mac and I are great friends."

"He's a grand old fellow, despite his weakness. We understand each other, Mac and I. He forgives me when I rate him for yielding to his besetting vice. I am sure the Divine Master will judge him leniently."

This is the first note which betrays the clergyman; but he speaks very simply, without a trace of cant.

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My uncle's cheery voice recalls us to the drawing-room, where a bridge table is set.

"You play cards!" I exclaim, in amazement, turning to the young minister.

"Yes, why not?" he replies, smilingly. "In the Anglican Church we don't look upon them as pictures of the Devil, like certain Phari-saical sects. If the dangerous element, 'gambling,' is eliminated, why deprive oneself of an innocent recreation?"

Under plea of having some work to finish—a sketch of red gum blossom, which I want to send off by next mail—I give my place to Hector, and move to a side table while the players begin their game.

To-night it is not by any means our usual bridge, serious, almost sacramental in its portentous solemnity, with grave discussions on every doubtful move.

The Reverend Hector plays a whimsical game, interrupting a "no-trump hand" to relate a comical anecdote of one of his parishioners, or to give his mother news of a family in whom she is interested.

Instead of calling him to order, as she would her husband or me, she listens with indulgent interest.

Bridge is my aunt's one weakness—the sole diversion which her impaired health permits. She only leaves her bed for the easy chair

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which is wheeled into the verandah or the drawing-room. By the way she thus neglects her favourite amusement, one may judge of her affection for her son.

Taking advantage of the renewal of the game, I study Hector at leisure. Scarcely above the average height, he appears tall, owing to the perfect symmetry and proportion of his limbs. His sun-tanned face shows its Scottish fairness only by a line near the roots of the hair. The firm lines of mouth and chin are apparent at a glance. The former is rather large, virile and well chiselled, the latter square and resolute, redeeming what some might consider a certain effeminacy in the other features. Hector will do what he wants to do, and it will be difficult to make him change an opinion.

His eyes are strangely attractive, and rivet attention at once—eyes of child-like candour and trust set in a man's face—grey, with luminous blue shadows, “the colour of the Scottish lakes,” as his mother fondly declares.

It is astonishing to meet in this Murray Missioner a gaze so limpid and pure, which seems never to have looked upon anything but beauty and virtue. For the first time I realise the truth of the poetic inspiration of Catulle Mendes who, in his superb drama, depicts St. Theresa passing unhurt through the most im-

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pious scenes and orgies of the Witches' Sabbath. An invincible purity surrounds her. She and her companions move in an atmosphere which veils from them all unholy visions.

The game finished, my uncle approaches under pretext of looking at my gum blossom, and says mischievously: "Well, Jeanette, is your painting as true to life as the one you did yesterday?"

"You wicked uncle! If you say another word I'll never kiss you again."

The threat is effective. He would sorely miss my morning and evening kisses, given on both cheeks, in good old French fashion.

The Anglican Service

Quel que soit le peuple et le point de l'histoire, au sein du paganisme, comme au sein d'Israel et dans les diverses parties du patrimoine Chretien, il sera permis à une élite de percevoir le soupir de l'homme vers le Dieu inconnu et la reponse de ce Dieu.

L. WAGNER.

An eventful morning !

For the first time in my life I am present at an Anglican service. The ball-room, unused since Mrs. Deslandes' ill-health, has been improvised into a chapel.

All the people of the station and the surrounding homesteads are assembled. The men, for the most part tall, vigorous and sunburnt, look one in the face as equals, free men in a free land. The women, with their beautiful hair and eyes, their fresh dainty frocks, are very sweet and attractive. Generally speaking, they possess more refinement than the men. One feels that the majority, even the poorest among them, read and reflect.

Mr. Brown, my uncle's manager, is in the front row with his wife. Daisy marshals in the children, looking after them with quite a maternal air. Her glorious blue eyes flash me a smiling greeting.

The domestics place themselves behind Mrs. Deslandes, who has left her room early in order to be present at the service conducted by her son.

As I take my place beside her mistress, Meg looks dumbfounded. Daisy seats herself at

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the harmonium and the service begins. It is with the greatest astonishment that I recognise almost all the ritual of the Mass—the Vestments of the priest, the Crucifix, the flowers, and even the candles burning on the altar. If it were not that the prayers are recited in English instead of Latin, I might think myself in a Roman Catholic Church like those to which I often used to go to hear the beautiful music.

What would some of our French Protestants say to it all? Rabid Calvinists, for example?

As for me, too indifferent, perhaps, to attach much importance to forms, I concentrate my attention on the clergyman.

He is no longer the simple young man who chatted and jested with us last night. He is a true priest, a hierophant even, accomplishing a divine mystery. A mystic atmosphere envelops him; an ardent faith illumines his face; his gestures are majestic. The sermon is scarcely eloquent, perhaps, but permeated with absolute conviction. Some words echo strangely in my modern ears, accustomed to the broad-minded discourses of good "Pasteur Wagner," the author of "The Simple Life," who used to welcome me every Sunday in Paris in his little Oratory. They were addresses rather than sermons, on Charity, Love, Justice. Hector speaks of Predestination, of Salvation reserved for the Elect, the chosen

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Vessels of Grace. I look curiously at the congregation to see the effect of this strange doctrine. Nobody seems restive.

My aunt follows with eyes and heart the utterances of the preacher, whose face is animated with an expression almost fanatic in its intensity. Meg listens with unction. It is quite clear she counts herself among the chosen few. For the life of me I cannot help thinking of Max O'Rell's story of the woman taken to task for her intolerance. "Do you think, my good woman, that only you and your husband will be saved?"

"Nae, nae, replied the old dame, shaking her head, "I'm na sae sure o' John."

Mr. and Mrs. Brown remain to dinner; on service days that has always been the custom.

I love Daisy more and more. She is youth and freshness incarnate. The sermon has not made much impression on her. The great problems of Predestination and Grace glide over her head like water on the proverbial duck's back. Her thoughts are busy with the forthcoming ball at Strathalbyn, when she is to "come out." Soon we are talking gaily of ball-dresses, partners and cotillions—things which after all are natural to youth.

Miracle of miracles! Meg has brought me a cup of tea, that delightful morning tea which

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puts one in a good temper for the rest of the day.

After fidgetting about for some minutes she says :

"Well, Miss Joan (it is thus she gives my name a Scottish flavour) I was surprised to see ye at the sairvice yester morn. Then it's nae true ye're a Papist?"

"Certainly not, Meg. What put that notion into your head?"

"For sure, Miss, I thocht that all Frenchies were Papists."

"What about my uncle, then?"

"Indeed, for all the religion the maister has, he micht be a pagan."

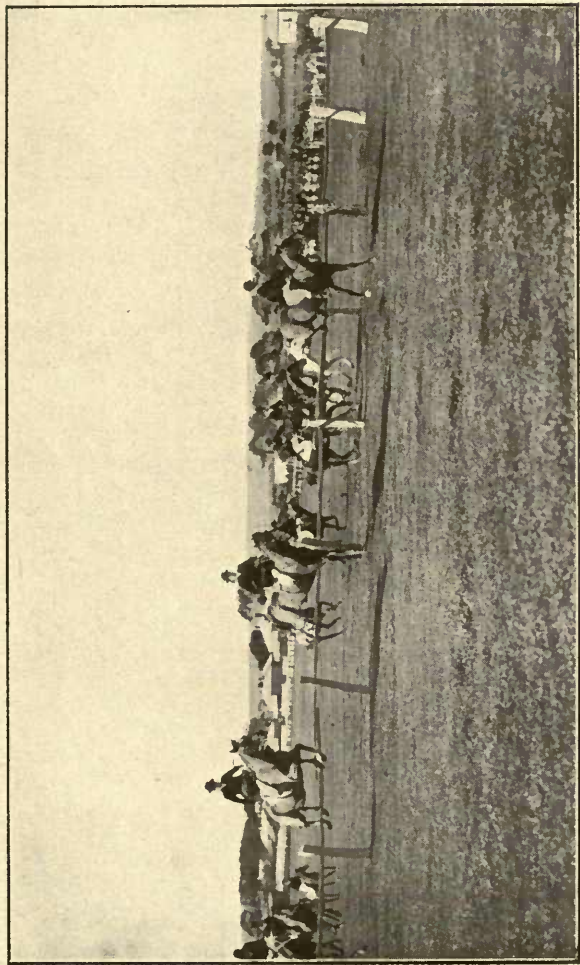
It is true, my dear uncle is much more interested in his sheep than in church services. But never mind, "le Bon Dieu" will keep a place for him in His Paradise.

Meg continues: "Hoo is it, then, Miss Joan, that you belong to the true Church?"

I cannot suppress a smile. Whatever one's particular creed may be, it is always that of the only true Church.

I explain that there are many Protestants in France, Calvinists especially.

Meg can scarcely credit her ears, and despite all my protestations, will not believe that *John Calvin*, as she calls him, was a Frenchman. That is quite beyond her.



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Only out of deference does she finally submit, inwardly sure that if he *did happen* to be born at Noyon, in France, it was only through an evil chance. He ought to have been a SCOT at any rate.

She leaves the room muttering : "John Calvin a Frenchy ! It's nae posseible."

VI

The Hunt Club Ball

And I knew the old, old vision—
Him with the sorrowful eyes
 (pain, unrelenting pain),
With the distant piercing unapproach-
able eyes.

I knew.

E. CARPENTES.

My uncle and I are spending two or three days at Strathalbyn, that coquettish little township nestling among the hills. Once a year the members of the Hunt Club meet here and Mr. Deslandes, an excellent horseman in spite of his advanced years, never fails to be present at this great sporting event.

I am still too much of a novice in the equestrian art to do other than venture the mild excitement of following the hounds in a carriage. Truth to tell, the ball interests me much more than the hunt. Sir Arthur and Lady Fairfax of The Grange, are old friends of my uncle, and welcome me cordially. He is tall, broad-shouldered, and vigorous; a splendid type of the "gentilhomme-fermier," or English Squire. She is small, fair, fragile, whom a breath might break. Their two daughters are a striking example of race evolution, tall, well-made, and passionately fond of outdoor amusements, riding, golf and tennis. Withal, they are charming, and devotedly attached to the delicate and frail little mother, whom they "protect" most affectionately. Their simple friendliness puts me at ease at once.

Immediately after dinner they conduct me

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to my room, adjoining theirs, and as a lady's maid is an almost unknown luxury in Australia, we assist each other to dress. They are keenly interested in my toilette, as their mother, in my aunt's absence, is going to chaperon me.

I must confess to a certain thrill as I don my first ball-dress, a "symphony" in pink, to the great consternation of my new friends, who declare that according to all precedent it should be white.

However, who is to know that it is my first ball? The dress is exquisite, a creation of Paquin, and the soft rosy hue of the silk will enhance the beauty of my pearl necklace.

The ball is held in the Institute, where all the functions of the township take place—balls, concerts, political and other meetings. The huntsmen wear their red coats, which gleam vividly among the light dresses of the women. Everybody knows my uncle, and we have no lack of partners. The attraction of novelty draws them, I think.

My first ball! Is it necessary to say more? The conversation, however, can scarcely be termed brilliant. Every partner asks me in turn how I like Australia, and, as I have to confess complete ignorance of horses and sport, the talk turns on Paris, of which almost all know something. The voyage "home," in-

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cluding a fortnight's whirl through Paris or the Riviera, is so simple nowadays that the wealthier class make it several times. But their Paris is not mine. Mine is that of Art, Literature and Learning; theirs, I am sadly afraid, is the gay city of the Boulevards, the races, the "Petits Theatres." However, we meet on common ground over public edifices and monuments, which they know better than I.

Whirling around to the inspiring music, I suddenly become conscious of a man's gaze fixed upon me steadily, insistently. There is something strangely agitating in its intensity. Passionate, yet tender, evoking a shadowy, dim remembrance of forgotten things, it allures even while it repels me. Against my will I feel compelled to turn towards him. My pleasure is almost spoilt, for each time we pass the silent figure I experience the half-sweet, half-painful sensation produced by an intoxicating and enervating perfume.

I have seen those eyes before; but where, where, where?

Pleading fatigue, I resume my seat beside Lady Fairfax. Talking to her, I watch the groups of dancers. Daisy is as happy as a bird. Her companions, with whom she has grown up, treat her as a young sister. One of them, Dick Power, cashier in the bank, evinces, it seems to me, a more than fraternal

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interest. He dances with her as often as etiquette will allow, and when he cannot he is generally hovering somewhere in her vicinity.

Amused by their little by-play, my uncle's voice makes me start. "Jeanne, let me introduce Mr. Allan Russell."

The man with the mysterious eyes is standing before me. Mr. Russell bows, and since I do not wish to dance, asks me to sit out with him. I cannot refuse; it would betray the impression he has made upon me.

His voice is deep, mellow and sympathetic. The conversation turns upon France, which he loves and knows well, for he goes there every year for the Salon and the Grand Prix, staying two or three months. He has met many of our artists and authors, and in discussing them, my first impression is forgotten.

The minutes slip by. Dick, who is to take me to supper, comes hurrying up. Promising my companion the first extra waltz, I take Dick's arm. Dick Power is just a big boy, with the soft, friendly eyes of a Newfoundland dog. He will make Daisy happy, I am sure. There will be nothing dramatic or morbid in the well-ordered course of their simple love. He makes no attempt to conceal his feelings.

"Isn't she a jolly girl?" he murmurs, as we cross the room to join Daisy and her cavalier.

To the manifest content of two of our party

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of four, an immediate change of partners is effected. My gaiety has returned. I cannot repress my laughter at the jests and sallies of my companions. My uncle, seated at the large table among the more staid guests, raises his eyebrows at me occasionally when our merriment threatens to become boisterous, but at heart the dear old man is delighted that I am enjoying myself so well.

The tuning of the violins is the signal for our return to the ballroom. Mr. Russell is waiting at the door and claims me for his waltz.

I have danced much this evening, and with good dancers, but I realise that up to this moment I have never known what a waltz could be. Our feet move in perfect unison. One spirit animates our two bodies, which sway in the same harmonious motion. I feel my partner's gaze becoming more and more insistent, his eyes plunge into mine, seeming to seek the inmost depths of my being. An invincible languor seizes me, my head begins to swim. . . .

By an immense effort of will I pull myself together. . . . I have only the strength to murmur, "Please stop, the heat oppresses me."

Conducting me to a little seat concealed by trailing festoons of foliage, he leaves me a mo-

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ment to get the glass of water I ask for. His short absence enables me to regain mastery over my feelings, and to analyse the bewildering sensations I have just experienced.

“Who is this man, an utter stranger an hour ago, whose gaze stirs my pulses, rousing latent forces and strangely elusive memories? Ah! my dream! I remember the eyes now. They are those of the Rajah. Have I been foolish enough to be influenced by a chance resemblance to a phantom of sleep?”

When Mr. Russell returns I am sufficiently composed to thank him and speak lightly of my giddiness, which I attribute to the heat and the scent of the flowers, by now rather pervasive.

Happily the guests are beginning to leave. My uncle is looking for me, and Mr. Russell accompanies us to the motor, which is to take us back to The Grange. The touch of his hand at parting sends the blood racing swiftly through my veins.

About ten next morning the huntsmen assemble at The Grange for the take-off. With them are four or five well-mounted ladies, including the daughters of our host, and all the young men from the outlying farms and country side on their best steeds. Few Australians are too poor not to possess an animal that can go or jump.

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The signal given, the hounds are unleashed and the hunt begins. Lady Fairfax and I are driving with some of the other guests. I am far too ignorant of sport to understand much of the procedure, and ply my companions with questions.

"The fox? Oh, the 'fox' is a bit of rag dipped in some evil-smelling fluid, and dragged over the course previously to furnish the scent."

"Why don't you import foxes? Surely it would make the hunt more interesting?"

"Unfortunately, we did, to our cost. They have become a scourge as bad as the rabbits. You see, they attack the sheep and destroy thousands of young lambs, eating only their tongues."

"What gourmets!"

"Quite so. This delicate taste on the part of Mr. Reynard has ruined several squatters. Sometimes a fox kills thirty or forty lambs in a single night. And then they multiply at such an alarming rate."

"They are more prolific than the gondolas of Mr. X.," laughed a lady.

"The gondolas!" I exclaim, opening my eyes in amazement.

"Oh! haven't you heard that story yet? It is generally aired for the benefit of 'new chums.' It dates back from the time when the

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municipal affairs of a great gold-mining centre were transacted by rough miners more remarkable for their energy than their culture."

"You make me curious."

"Well, one of them, you see, had travelled a little and developed a romantic turn of mind. He proposed to import a dozen gondolas for the lake in course of construction."

"They would liven up the landscape," he urged. Another alderman rose, and after some words expressive of his love for the town and his desire to spare nothing that would enable it to rival the great European cities he added :

"Why this unnecessary expense? Wouldn't it be sufficient to import a couple or two. In our prolific climate we should soon have the dozen which my honourable colleague desires."

I laugh merrily at the anecdote.

The huntsmen are coming towards us at full gallop, clearing the fences in gallant style. The interest of this exciting steeple-chase is centred in the manner in which rider and horse negotiate each obstacle, generally in a dual capacity, but sometimes quite independently.

Lady Fairfax covers her eyes as her daughters rise to the fence like two little amazons.

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How comes it that this sweet, gentle dove is the mother of these fearless eaglets?

Mr. Russell is mounted on a magnificent black. Rider and horse are one like a centaur. In the excitement of the chase, he passes without seeing me, and I feel, I don't know why, a little hurt.

"Look at Allan Russell," remarks a lady. "Doesn't he look splendid on horseback!"

"Yes; he sits like an Englishman, more correctly than our young people."

"It would be much better if the 'correctness' were in his conduct rather than in his riding," retorts the first lady, resenting even this slight criticism of her countrymen.

"Why? Is there anything amiss with it?"

"Much. In the first place, he seems to care far too little for his own wife whom one never sees, and far too much for the wives of others."

So, he is married, then! I am surprised and vaguely troubled.

Certainly it is not love I feel for this man. It is rather a kind of obsession, a response to the appeal in his eyes which awakens something obscure, half forgotten.

Well, I am warned now, at any rate. He has a wife. And his eloquent glances mean only a passing flirtation.

After the hunt-luncheon, at which the women only appear for the speeches and

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toasts, my uncle and I start for Gwylata, taking with us Daisy, who can scarcely tear herself from her beloved Dick.

With a detached air, well-assumed I hope, I listen to Allan Russell's parting words :

"This is not to be good-bye, Mademoiselle. Mr. Deslandes has kindly asked me to spend a day at Gwylata ; so in a little while, I hope to meet you again."

VII

Bahloo

I see the stalwart aborigines straying
naked through the primal woods, light-
footed amid the grass. I hear their
powerful cries and calls to each other,
resounding from cliffs and gullies.

E. CARPENTES.

Bahloo is the little black boy of whom my aunt has taken charge since the death of his mother, Meamei. He is being brought up at the aboriginal mission house, which is under the spiritual direction of Hector, who can thus keep watch on the child's welfare.

Meamei, the victim, or perhaps the culprit, in a *crime passionnel*—the silence of the bush holds the secret of many such—was one day brought with her newly-born infant to my uncle's station in Queensland. Wounded, and almost dead with hunger, she had dragged herself along many weary miles. Knowing only a few words of English, she either could not, or would not, give any information about herself. She seemed to live in dread of her life.

Some suspicious-looking blacks having been seen loitering near the station, my uncle had Meamei removed to Gwylata in order to escape the danger she feared.

Here, she quickly regained her vivacity and light-heartedness. She learned to gabble English, and soon found a new admirer in the person of Byanee, a native from the Point McLeay Station.

They were married very soon, the question of Bahloo's father, alive or dead, being a moral

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subtlety not particularly necessary to dwell upon when dealing with the blacks.

Meamei had been dead several months, and as Bahloo's stepfather was inclined to express his paternal obligations more by cuffs than care, my aunt had taken charge of the little one.

The whole family was interested in the picaninny, and when he fell sick Mrs. Deslandes wanted to bring him into the house at once. Hector, however, fearing possible infection, had him taken to MacMahon's cottage.

"Mac will make an excellent nurse. When he has a trust reposed in him, he would die of thirst rather than touch a drop of whisky."

"Yes," said my uncle, "and once the responsibility ceases?"

"Then it will be our turn to look after him."

"I am thinking, though, what is to become of your riding lessons, little cousin, if I take away your instructor, unless," bowing profoundly, "you will allow me to take his place and ride with you to-morrow."

"Certainly, Hector, if you will let me help look after Bahloo."

"I don't think you ought to. The symptoms are grave. I am afraid it is typhoid."

Then, after a moment's hesitation, he added, smiling,

"It is scarcely right for me, a clergyman, to

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dissuade you from doing a good deed. If you will take proper precautions”

“Oh! I will be prudence itself. I adore nursing. My dearest dream was to become a doctor, until uncle vetoed it. You shuddered with horror, godfather, didn't you, at the mere thought of having a niece an M.D.?”

He is a little old-fashioned in his notions, the dear man, but I love him with all my heart, in spite of, perhaps because of, the difference in our opinions.

This morning, immediately after breakfast, Hector and I go to see Bahloo.

Mac is waiting for us at the door of his cottage, which consists of one large room, a small kitchen, and a wide, shady verandah, where one can lounge luxuriously.

My uncle has housed him very comfortably, that he may have less reason for yielding to his weakness.

The baby is in Mac's bed. He himself sleeps on a mattress on the floor. Little Bahloo is all but unconscious. His black skin looks dull and lifeless. Only his eyes are large and brilliant with fever.

Poor little pariah! What has he done to be sent into the world?

His tiny body still bears the marks of Byanee's hand. Hector understands medicine. In the bush, where doctors are rare, the parson

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has often to look after the bodies as well as the souls of his parishioners.

Does he not thereby follow humbly in the footsteps of the Great Pastor, who journeyed through Judea healing the afflicted, as he preached the new Gospel of love and hope?

After arranging the hours when I should relieve Mac in his new duties, we return to the house.

The horses have been brought round to the verandah, ready for our ride. In place of my old Jenny, the groom holds my cousin's horse, Said, a beautiful animal, the pick of the stable, the best mount in the country, as Mac has proudly asserted on several occasions.

"Look, Hector, they have made a mistake with the saddles."

"Said is yours now, Jeanne—that is, if you will accept him. I have really no time for riding," he adds, to remove any scruple I may have, "and it would be a crime not to use such a noble animal, wouldn't it?"

Said, quite conscious that we are speaking of him, lays his velvety nose on Hector's shoulder and whinnies caressingly out of sheer joy.

We begin our ride.

Said is a perfect treasure. When his ardour is too great for my inexperience, a word from my companion renders him docile and obedient.

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My new instructor is much more difficult to please than Mac. Nothing misses his keen eyes. He has evidently determined to make me a good horsewoman.

Our little patient is getting better. The attack is a mild one. He is sleeping now, and to pass the time, I take one of my uncle's books from Mac's shelf. It is the "Life of Father Damien," by Clifford.

I read the first pages with keenly awakened interest, and when Mac comes in to relieve me, I carry off the volume.

Comfortably stretched on my cane lounge, I continue its perusal. It is as fascinating as a romance, this life of the hero of the lepers, so splendid in its devotion and simplicity.

Hector, whose approach is unheeded, so great is my absorption, bends over to read the title of the book.

Suddenly he draws himself up, his mobile features contracting.

"Ah! you are reading about Father Damien. I envy him as much as I admire him."

"But, Hector, leprosy! That frightful disease of which he died!"

His face grows sombre.

"I would give everything," dropping his

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voice, "to become a real missionary and go to Molokai."

"It would kill your mother, Hector."

"After all," he continues, musingly, "there is a moral leprosy also, that of indifference and impiety. I can find plenty of opportunities to fight that."

I remain silent. I don't like these burning religious questions. Feeling that we may clash, the wisest course is to avoid them.

.
It is an odd thing that Hector, so good to the rough bushmen, interesting himself in the petty details of their lives, so sweet and tender to his mother, whom he surrounds with a protecting love, so considerate towards me, whom he treats as a little sister, should become cold and stern directly a question of dogma is broached. Is it an atavistic survival of Puritan times and teaching?

Perhaps it is due to the narrowness of his education. Strange, indeed, that he, so clear and wide-visioned, so eclectic in all literary matters, should have read nothing of those great religious writings outside the pale of orthodoxy!

To-day we have had our first quarrel. It was over Renan's "Life of Jesus." He is greatly astonished that I have been permitted to read it.

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"It is a dangerous book, Jeanne, an evil book."

"How do you know, if you have not read it?" I cannot refrain from answering, rather hotly.

.

Since Hector's departure on mission duty, Meg helps me to look after our little pica-ninny. She has installed herself as head nurse, and it is amusing to see how she marshals MacMahon and myself. In the twinkling of an eye, she has turned the cottage inside out. It is so spick and span now that it must feel quite lonely. A huge stack appeared suddenly in the back yard, composed of the treasured accumulations of years. Ancient letters, old ragged garments, littered on the floor or stowed away in cupboards, old broken pipes, odds and ends of all kinds, were submissively carried out by Mac himself.

At Meg's stern order he set fire to the pile with his own hands and stood ruefully watching his treasures disappear in smoke.

I was afraid that such drastic proceedings would offend him. But, no! To my sympathetic condolences, he replies with a complacent shake of his head.

"Begorra!" This is his favourite swear word—the only one he permits himself in my

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presence. "But she's a masterful woman, a woman with a head on her shoulders."

Oh! what an idea!

Meg and Mac. The two extremes.

But extremes meet, they say. Why not make a match between the two? A little diplomacy and success will crown my efforts. I will sow the grain and leave it to time to germinate.

"Meg," I begin, as she brings me a cup of tea next morning, a duty she has taken upon herself to show her penitence for having suspected me of the crime of being a Papist, "Meg, you must have had a good many sweethearts in your time."

"What an idea, Miss Joan! Why do you say that?"

"Well, you see, you have an admirer now, Meg."

"An admirer, Miss! What silly nonsense! Saving your presence, Miss."

"It's quite true, Meg, I assure you. He has eyes only for you. But you are making the poor man desperate by your indifference."

"This is one of your French jokes, isn't it, Miss?"

"No, Meg; really, it's very serious, you know. Do you mean to say that you have never noticed the effect you have on Mac? Why, the poor man can scarcely pluck up

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courage to look you in the face, but when your back is turned, his eyes follow you everywhere."

"That good-for-nothing of a Mac! Sure, it's better for him to look at me than at his whisky bottle."

"Cruel Meg! Your disdain will drive him to despair."

The old dame went off, muttering something about the silly heads that think of nothing but love and lovers.

In reality, she is not at all displeased. What woman is, even if she be a septuagenarian, at the thought of having a lover?

"Jeanette, Jeanette!"

My uncle is calling me.

"I have just received a letter from Russell. He will lunch with us to-morrow, and . . . Oh, he sends his compliments and regards to you. Take care, girlie! Don't let your heart be touched by this Byronic hero," he added, smilingly.

My dear uncle doesn't know how serious the case is already. In the privacy of my room, I question myself anxiously.

"What shall I do? Remain and receive Mr. Russell? Fall again under the charm of his personality? At the bare thought my heart beats quickly. His sombre eyes seem again to

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fix mine, compelling me to explore unknown depths of joy and suffering.

Unknown? I wonder.

No, no! I will absent myself on some pretext or other. To fly from danger is sometimes a proof of true courage. Hastily I send off a note to Daisy, asking her to meet me to-morrow morning. She shall drive me to Wellington in her dog-cart. When we return late at night all danger of a meeting will be passed.

Daisy is punctually at the rendezvous.

She is delighted at the chance of going to the township, where Dick's Bank is. He will find someone to take his duties for a time so that he may be our cavalier.

My uncle is surprised and a trifle displeased at our departure. Soon, however, he regains his good temper. Is he cognizant of Mr. Russell's reputation?

At any rate, he doesn't insist on my remaining, and I leave to him the task of explaining my absence. Meg will look after Bahloo. It is one of my aunt's good days, and she will be able to preside over the luncheon table. I can go with a clear conscience, and give myself almost without regret to the pleasure of chatting with Daisy, who is too good a whip to mind the dual occupation.

What a charming girl Daisy is! Healthy in mind and body, frank, ingenuous, and

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bright, she is a true type of Australian girlhood.

Her nature has developed like a beautiful wayside plant in the wide sunny spaces of Australia.

One must not exact from her artistic or abstract ideals. Born in a country without a history, she possesses no feeling for the past, no veneration for the great heroes of the world. But she vibrates to all the pristine forces of a simple and natural life.

During the drive she opens her heart to me.

Dick and she are engaged. They are too poor to get married yet, but so soon as he is promoted to the management of a country bank their parents will help them to start house-keeping.

Naturally, Dick is delighted to see us. With the freedom of this happy land from rigid conventionality, he takes complete charge of us. We lunch at the hotel, where the merry repartees of my companions make me forget the reason of my presence.

Lunch over, we go to the river for a row. The two lovers ply their oars in unison, exchanging candid glances of love and tenderness as they discuss their future plans. They consider me as their friend and confidante. I wonder if one day I also shall come across a man who will love me simply and purely with a calm, un-

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troubled affection like theirs, without ecstasy perhaps, but also without shame.

I considerably turn my attention to the river banks, umbrageous with willows, which the early settlers, the pioneers of the district, planted there. They have grown to dimensions quite unknown in more temperate climes. I amuse myself following the friskings and gambols of quite an aquatic fauna at the water's edge, wild duck, teal, gracefully poised cranes, shags, and huge pelicans. Cockatoos, black and white, fly from tree to tree, uttering their harsh dissonant cries. The clear, flute-like notes of the magpie pierce the summer air.

"This is a sportsman's paradise," remarks Dick, who is nothing if not practical.

We return to Gwylata by moonlight. Mr. Russell, as I expected, is no longer there.

"He was very disappointed not to have seen you," said my aunt. "He wanted to say good-bye before leaving for Europe, where he intends spending several months."

So complex are my feelings that it is half with regret and half with relief that I learn of his departure, which will put half the globe between us.

Bahloo has evinced a great fondness for Meg's society. She is quite proud of it, and her face relaxes its severity when the funny

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little chap strokes her wrinkled cheeks with his tiny hands. This afternoon she has dressed him for his first outing since his illness. With what an air of importance she carries him in her arms! Mac follows, holding a parasol to shield them from the sun, which even thus early in the season is very warm in the middle of the day.

Mrs. Deslandes, watching the trio from the verandah, cannot understand the *entente cordiale* between these queerly assorted individuals. But I let her into the secret of my matchmaking scheme. At first she laughs. Then, growing serious, says,

“It is really a capital idea, Jeanne. What would have become of the poor old soul when I am gone? She will, at any rate, have a companion and an interest in life.”

VIII

Shearing
Time

On la tond,
On la tond,
La laine du mouton.

RONDE ENFANTINE.

For some days we have scarcely seen anything of Mr. Deslandes. It is the busiest time of the year on the station, and his attention is given wholly to the shearing.

All the outbuildings have been opened up—the sheds, the packing rooms where the wool is compressed into bales, and the quarters for the shearers, who have arrived in a body.

Despite my uncle's protests, I am going to watch the sheep being shorn.

It is a weird sight! Once is sufficient; I do not wish to repeat the experience. There is something so savage and bestial in the scene. Half-naked men rushing wildly about, waving their arms and shouting like demons in the midst of bleating, terrified sheep; the atmosphere of steaming humanity, of pungent animal odours, of blood even, for now and then a poor beast is wounded by the shears. It mounts to one's brain, intoxicating and revolting at the same time.

I could not look on for more than a few minutes, and not until I have had a long gallop on Said, inhaling great draughts of the saline air which blows across the lake from the

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Southern Ocean, do I feel clean and fresh again.

Hector never fails to be home at this time. He organises concerts and other amusements in the large common room set apart for the shearers.

Some of the men have fine voices, untrained but clear and resonant, developed in sunshine and liberty. Sometimes lantern pictures are thrown on the wall, and it is always a marvel to me to see these big children of the bush so interested in Old World pictures. Snow scenes especially arouse their wonder and admiration, and a thoughtful face here and there indicates that memory is back among the half-effaced scenes of childhood. The phonograph is brought into requisition, and a dance generally winds up the evening's fun—a dance with men only, like those on board a man-of-war.

What a strange nomadic people are these shearers! Journeying from station to station, traversing Australia from north to south, according to the seasons, rough, uncouth and violent, with quick passions, counting on the need of their services to make their own terms with the squatters! Poor people! I can scarcely blame them; their lives are hard, their work strenuous.

Many have no greater ambition or hope than to "knock down" the cheque so labori-

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ously earned, in the nearest bar, which, thanks to the machinations of the publican and the seductions of the barmaid, they only leave when their last penny is gone. . . . I heard of the wife of a wealthy hotel-keeper who actually sat down and cried with vexation because a shearer left the hotel with thirty shillings still in his pocket.

Then the journey to the next station is resumed, and the same pitiful comedy, I might almost say tragedy, is re-enacted.

Comparatively few return to the cities. The shearing season over, the majority still tramp from station to station, arriving generally about sunset, and asking a meal and a night's lodging which are rarely refused. Hence the expressive name given to them—*Sundowners*.

What is the secret spell which this silent and mysterious land of far distances weaves around these Bohemians of the Bush who prefer to cook their simple meals and boil their "billy" on the track, sleeping at night under a stately gum, through whose pendant leaves filters the soft light of the Southern Cross?

Few abandon the life—they may go to the capital occasionally for a "jolly spree," as they call it, but the Spirit of the Bush calls with insistent voice; an unseen presence is on the trail, and they must fain follow.

The need of affection drives them to seek

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companionship with another "mate," that expressive word which indicates a community of interest, affection and fidelity.

One meets them thus in couples, helping each other through difficult moments, sharing alike good and bad fortune, tending each other in illness until, perhaps, the summons of the Dread Spectre calls for the last service which faithful hands can give. The Bush has its silent, secret language, known only to its initiates. A cross, rudely cut in a tree above an initial, may be passed quite unsuspectingly by an outsider, but the bushman knows that it marks the last resting-place of an unknown comrade, and his hat is reverently raised as he passes on. So, too, may he sleep in the deep stillness.

.

I am never tired of listening to Hector.

Full of sympathy himself, he possesses the rare gift of evoking it in others. His interest in the material welfare of the men on the station is as keen as his desire to awaken the religious instinct in their hearts.

In the daytime when every one is busy we resume our rides. My aunt, whom I am afraid of neglecting, is the first to find a pretext for sending us off together. Placing her pretty hand on my shoulder, she said to me this morning :

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"I am so happy that my two children get on so well together; that is right, enjoy your youth."

Sometimes Hector takes me for a row on the lake.

Neither lofty mountains nor far vistas move me so deeply as a little rocky inlet by the sea-shore, a turn of the river bordered with poplars, or a tiny stream babbling under willows.

Is it the magnetism of the water, its fluidity, its incessant movement, the latent life which is imprisoned? Or is it simply the interchanging play of light and shadow which gives it a new aspect every moment?

Our corner of the lake is fringed with weeping willows, whose tender green tassels contrast vividly with the dull-toned gum trees.

Mooring our boat to the trunk of a tree, we pass long hours on the unruffled water.

Hector is initiating me into the beauties of Burns, Keats and Shelley, the obscurities of Browning, whom he admires above all; the lofty socialism of Ruskin, which strongly appeals to me.

We discuss the perennial disputes between England and France, and compare Shakespeare and Victor Hugo.

Naturally, the national poet of each is exalted in turn.

"Shakespeare!" exclaims Hector, rhetori-

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cally; "the myriad-minded, the Seer of the Ages, whose intellect resolved the secrets of Humanity, whose sympathy softened them into music. His soul is the garner-house of immemorial experiences."

To which I reply :

"Victor Hugo, 'the Poet of the Soul.' His heart is a lyre which resounds to all vibrations. He loves, he fights, he suffers with all humanity."

IX

Engaged

Ce que le flot dit aux rivages,
Ce que le vent dit aux vieux monts,
Ce que l'astre dit aux nuages,
C'est le mot ineffable. Aimons.

VICTOR HUGO.

A snake crossing the road, a sudden shy on the part of Said, and the whole world is transfigured !

Hector and I start for a ride immediately after breakfast in order to escape the heat. We have not gone far when an unexpected swerve nearly unseats me. Said, startled by a snake darting in front of him, rears and then bolts.

Hector's voice is powerless to stop him. I lose all control ; the reins drop from my nerveless fingers, a sudden shock

Words of tenderness and love recall me to consciousness. Hector's face, drawn with emotion, is bending over me. I close my eyes quickly, but a tell-tale rush of blood to my cheeks betrays that I have heard. He assists me to rise. Beyond a little giddiness I am not hurt.

We remain a moment facing each other in a silence fraught with intense feeling, broken by Hector's grave voice.

"I did not wish to speak so soon, dear, but seeing you lying there unconscious, perhaps dead, the words leapt from my heart. You know it now, Jeanne, I love you."

"All that is good and noble in my nature responds to his words. I place my hands in

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his. A kiss soft as a sigh brushes my trembling lips.

Then, standing back a little the better to read in my eyes the answer for which he is longing, he says :

“The wife of a minister, dear ! It is a serious life for a gay little Parisienne. You are sure that you will regret nothing ?”

“Quite sure,” I murmur. And a feeling of infinite calm, of inward rest and contentment pervades me. In the pure atmosphere in which he lives, my little weaknesses and feminine vanities will disappear. I shall become the woman I want to be—a woman worthy of him.

The sun high above the horizon recalls us to the flight of time and to the fact that the Gwylata folk will be getting anxious at our prolonged absence. Hector is unwilling that I should remount Said, who, after his escape, has come back and is browsing quietly near Sultan.

Throwing the bridles over our arms, we walk slowly home, discussing the plans for our future.

My aunt, evidently uneasy, is watching for us from the verandah. She is quick to divine the news in our altered glances, and calls her husband to share her delight. Both beam with joy. Their greatest desire is realised.

“I am not at all surprised,” says my uncle,

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teasingly; "since the day I saw a certain portrait wherein Jeanne depicted her ideal, I expected it would end thus." My menacing frown prevents further disclosures. . . .

Mr. Deslandes, in the exuberance of his joy, is quite unable to keep the secret. Soon the whole station shares it.

I am overwhelmed with congratulations, for Hector is loved by all these honest souls who have known him from childhood.

Mac comes last, and draws me aside in a mysterious manner. Since I am now an important personage, he gives me his confidence.

"Sure, our parson is very lucky to find such a pretty colleen," he says, sighing dolorously.

"Well, Mac, why don't you follow his example and look for one too?"

"There is no need to look far, Miss Mam'selle, you know who it is. Ah! if she would only take me as you are taking Master Hector, it would be better for everybody."

"Including little Bahloo?"

"Yes; Bahloo, too. Though I should set him a shocking example sometimes, I know," shaking his head with a naive complaisance towards his pet delinquency.

"Well, Mac, you had better go and speak to her at once."

"I dare not, Miss Mam'selle, she intimates me just awful."

THE BLACK PEARL.

I laugh at the picture of my old bushman, six feet high and proportionately broad, trembling with emotion before Meg's dour face.

But love has opened my eyes, and awakened depths of feelings which I did not suspect. So placing my hand affectionately on my old friend's arm, I say, "Come, Mac, courage. If you succeed—and I hope you will—we will give you a fine wedding."

And the big-hearted old man, so weak against himself, squeezes my hand with such vigour that I nearly cry out.

.
I cannot sleep to-night.

Seated at my open window, I murmur my happiness to the stars which gaze down upon me from their radiant heights.

Hector loves me. Joy, sweet, calm and profound pervades my whole being.

This, then, is love—real love!

There is nothing in it of the wild agitation and excitement I felt under Allan Russell's strange gaze. When Hector presses my hand my blood keeps its wonted flow. When he kissed me this evening I remained as cool as though it had been a paternal embrace from my guardian.

Nevertheless, I love him. I am sure of it. The thought of passing my life with him is

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sweet. All my aspirations towards the Good, the Beautiful and the Infinite attract and draw me closer to him. I am happy at the idea of confiding my future to his care. He will be an ideal husband—the friend and brother of my soul.

How glad I am to be able to pay the debt of gratitude which I owe these generous friends who have taken me to their hearts so warmly.

There will be no more danger of seeing the enthusiast start forth on a foolish mission of self immolation. I recall my uncle's words :

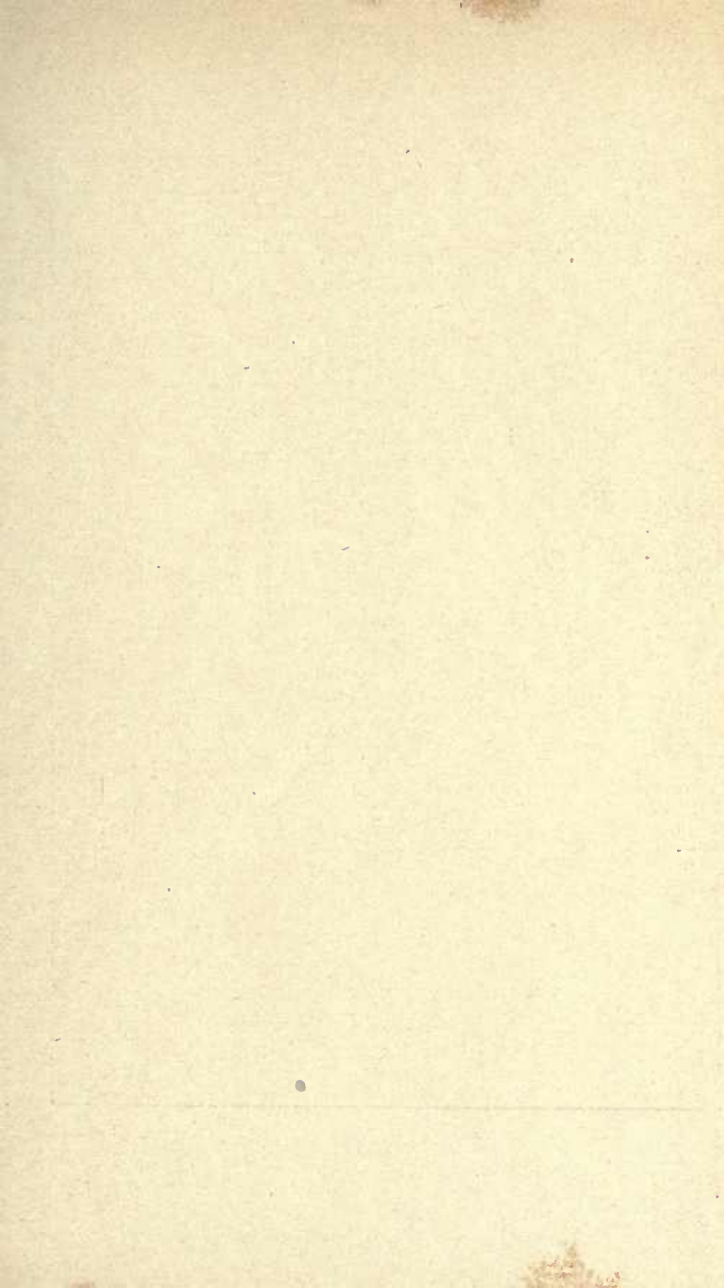
“You have clipped his wings, little girl; he is bound to the old home now, and our two children will remain near us always.”

The
Spirit
and
the
Letter

Une seule chose est nécessaire, d'après
l'Evangile La voici :

L'homme pécheur et misérable est
aimé de Dieu pour le temps et pour
l'Eternité.

C. WAGNER (Justice).





MEG.

Hector has returned to the Murray after some halcyon days, spent together. Golden hours, whose minutes are counted by the emotions, sweet confidences wherein soul communes with soul, and words are but the gross envelope of feelings which they reveal.

The separation is hard, so soon after our *fiançailles*. But he will write every day, and I have promised to consider myself an Australian "fiancee," and write in return.

He must not expect poetic effusions. Words of love lose their fragrance when written. The sound of the beloved voice, the magnetism of the living presence are necessary to give them their true value. My letters will consist only of prosaic details of the station life and of my studies . . . for I have a great project in view of which I have not yet said a word.

I am going to study THEOLOGY!

The wife of a minister ought to share the religious beliefs of her husband, I suppose. This is a point I have never dared discuss with Hector for fear that we should clash; but now I long to know something of those dogmas which mould his inner life. My own religion, one of sentiment only, has never been troubled with any vexed doctrinal questions. Protes-

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tant in name, it is true, but educated in a State *Lycee* with Catholics and even Jewesses, where the teaching imparted was moral and altruistic, I conformed to an ideal of life lofty enough, but absolutely outside all creeds and dogmas.

I am quite prepared to share a life of self-denial with Hector. Before he left he asked me if I would consent to devote a part of his income to certain good works which he has in view, necessitating a very simple life for ourselves.

"To lead the 'Simple Life' of my dear Pasteur Wagner has always been my dream," I replied, smiling. "It will be scarcely necessary, will it? My guardian is rich, and he will help us."

"You must not count on uncle's wealth, Jeanne; the station is not prospering, in spite of appearances. Moreover, he speculates, and with his sanguine temperament and ignorance of mining affairs generally, I am afraid, very much afraid . . ."

"He ought to reduce his expenditure, discharge some of the hands, sell the motor . . ."

"I have thought of it often, and spoken to him, but without result. Fortunately, I have my father's small fortune, and whatever happens he and my mother are secure of a home with US," pressing my arm lovingly.

.

THE BLACK PEARL.

This very day I am going to begin my theological education. Comfortably ensconced in a corner of the verandah shut off by a huge screen so as not to be disturbed, my little table piled with frowning tomes taken from Hector's private library, I attack the bull by the horns.

The Thirty-nine Articles of the Anglican Faith.

After several hours' steady perusal, I let the book fall.

Predestination. The Redemption of Sin by the blood of Jesus Christ. Eternal Salvation obtained by Faith alone, irrespective of deeds. Belief in an Eternal Hell!

Are these doctrines, which seem to me reminiscent of a long past day, still really taught in the Anglican Church? Oh, Jesus, gentle Prophet of Nazareth, You who journeyed through Judea, preaching to the lowly your Gospel of Love, what has been made of your teaching?

I carry my difficulties to my uncle, but he pooh-poohs them.

"Why bother your head about it at all, little girl? Leave Theology to others, and come for a walk with me."

"But, uncle, I must try to understand. It can't be possible that Hector teaches . . ."

"Tut, tut! That won't concern you. Your role will be to cut out little frocks for the kid-

THE BLACK PEARL.

dies, distribute soup to the old people, and port wine to the invalids—which reminds me to stock your cellar forthwith for that purpose.”

I take refuge in silence. I will write to Hector. He will not find my scruples childish. He will understand and explain matters to my full satisfaction.

• • • • •
Meg and Mac have asked for a day's leave.

They want to go to Stráthalbyn to get married by the Presbyterian Minister.

I wonder who put the fateful question!

Did Mac muster sufficient courage, or—did Meg take the initiative?

“Meg, why didn't you wait a day or two? Mr. Hector would have been back, and we could have had a fine wedding feast.”

“Nae, nae; Maister Hector is guid enow to preach on the Sabbath, Miss Joan, but we maun hae a true minister to marry us. Maister Hector is nae sound enow in doctrine.”

Not sound enough!

If Hector's views are too liberal for her, surely there is hope for me!

Mr. Deslandes lends them the motor for the great event, and we witness their departure in grand style.

Meg and Mac are truly superb!

But Bahloo!!!

THE BLACK PEARL.

Words fail to do justice to his elaborate splendour.

For he is going also. As best man, I suppose.

The dusky mite holds himself painfully rigid in the resplendent ruby velveteen suit Meg has made for the occasion.

And how in the world has she procured here the sailor hat with "Nelson" in gilt letters around it, which is perched jauntily on his mop of frizzy hair? Would not the word "Cupid" suit better the circumstances? In truth, has not our picaninny played the part of a little black "Deus in Machina"?

Mrs. Deslandes is a little hurt that Meg should leave her *service personnel* without a word of regret. It has all been done so hurriedly that we have had no time to replace her. But it will be a pleasure to take Meg's duties upon myself for a while.

After the usual Bridge, I accompany my aunt to her room to render her the little services which her weakness necessitates.

But, behold the faithful handmaiden at her post as usual!

"Meg, you here?" exclaims her mistress.

"You surely didn't think I was going to abandon you?" comes the calm reply.

"But what will your husband say?" I question wonderingly, opening my eyes at this

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startling development in honeymoon etiquette, "and who is going to keep house for him and Bahloo?"

"Oh, I can easily manage that if the mistress will let me off for an hour or two in the morning. . . . Noo, Miss Joan," lapsing into the vernacular, "gang to bed yer ain sel'. Ye can sleep quite peacefully, the mistress will want for naught."

I make my exit, leaving the two old friends—friends in sooth, despite the difference of their station—to resume the even tenor of their ways, which no incident so frivolous as Meg's marriage could interrupt.

XI

The Letter Kills

Doù viennent l'intolérance, les haines religieuses, la polémique et le fanatisme? Ils tiennent tous à une fausse conception de l'essence et du but de la Religion.

C. WAGNER (Justice).

The inquisitor was sometimes conscientious when he racked and burned his brother man for the glory of God and the salvation of the souls of others who might be inclined to follow that heretical brother; he acted with a clear conscience, honestly believing himself to be doing service both to God and to man.

ANNIE BESANT.

His letter has arrived.

A cold chill has passed over my heart. Can it really be Hector who, ignoring the spirit of the Gospel, has written these words, with their sophistry and fanatical respect for the letter of the Jewish Bible?

“ If you deny Revelation everything crumbles under your feet. . . . It is your duty to accept and believe the truth taught by the Church. Has not the Saviour promised that He will always be with his Church even to the end of the world, to guide it in the path of Truth? . . . The Bible is the directly inspired word of God, and we must bow before its teaching without presuming to judge it. . . . All Faith rests on the doctrine of the Redemption, of Predestination, of the Day of Judgment. . . . Many of our clergy themselves ignore these subjects. They are spiritual heretics, freethinkers under the garb of the Church. . . .

Then follows an exhortation :

“Beloved, cease your doubts. Prostrate yourself before the Cross, stained with the blood of Christ, that blood shed in order to efface the sins of the world. Come, before the

THE BLACK PEARL.

justice of an angry God bars the way.”

He finishes with these words, which in his sincere but blind faith he believes must touch me :

“Pray for the Light ! Oh, my life, may our Saviour enlighten you with his Grace !

.
No, no, I cannot pray. I do not want this unjust Grace which would single me out arbitrarily. Rather would I remain in doubt, in negation, even, than admit this conception of a partial Creator who cannot be appeased but by the abasement of Conscience and intelligence, the greatest gifts bestowed by him.

.
Hector is here. For a week he has tried all means, arguments, persuasion, tenderness, to break what he calls my intellectual pride.

He makes me read Pusey, Stanley, Weldon.
. . . In vain he cites the great minds, the lofty spirits who have accepted uncomplainingly the dogmas which revolt me—above all, that of an eternal Hell. This is the one upon which he is most inflexible.

“Then those you term pagans,” I argue, “you condemn them also to this eternal punishment?”

“We have no right to judge God. In his immutable justice He separates the sheep from the goats.”

THE BLACK PEARL.

"If He is cruel enough to condemn those who have no means of knowing Him, I should prefer to be with them in Hell rather than in Heaven yith your God."

These controversies, which leave me utterly broken and exhausted, only increase the gulf between us.

.
Hector has adjured me by the regard I have for him, by the submission I owe him as priest, by our love for each other, to make an act of intellectual humility and come to the Communion Table to-morrow morning.

I could have done so once. In the little Paris oratory of Pasteur Wagner I sometimes partook of the Communion. But he never preached this God of Vengeance, this Father appeased only by the blood of his own Son! . . . Now, this act of Communion would be sheer hypocrisy, a blasphemy against my conscience. No, even though I lose Hector's love, sunder our lives, I must be honest with myself and him.

The evening has passed apparently as usual, dinner en famille, followed by bridge, but the atmosphere is charged with suppressed emotion. My aunt, sensitive like all nervous natures, to external influences, suspects that something is wrong. She is troubled and looks at us anxiously. My guardian asks me to

THE BLACK PEARL.

sing. I cannot. My throat is constricted as though in a vice.

As I look up from the book I have taken I encounter Hector's gaze.

His eyes are fixed upon me, seeking to impose his will on my soul. Thought is really a force. I feel his beating against my brain, seeking to break down my resistance, to absorb my personality, stupefying me as with an anaesthetic.

The night has been one long struggle.

My tortured heart has striven to convince my reason.

I have retraced again and again all the old theological arguments, the problems remain unsolved. I endeavour to pray; the words halt on my lips. I see before me only a precipice, a void, ready to engulf me.

I have no courage to appear at breakfast. I even hesitate whether I shall go to matins, but it looks too cowardly to stay away. Besides, who knows? A flash of Faith, a spark from the Divine Light may descend upon me and dissipate my doubts.

When I enter the little improvised chapel Hector is already at the altar.

For one moment his eyes seek mine with devouring intensity. Then he turns and gives himself wholly to his office.

THE BLACK PEARL.

His voice, more sonorous than usual, has deep notes in it which go straight to my soul as he pronounces the words of the solemn ritual.

"I bid you in the name of God, I call you in Christ's behalf, I exhort you as ye love your own salvation, that ye will be partakers of this holy Communion." My whole being rushes towards him. I rise to follow the communicants. A force greater still holds me back. The voice of my conscience cries so loudly that I seem to actually hear it within my heart. "You no longer believe, you no longer believe. It is a crime towards him, towards God, to yield to a momentary emotion. Better to separate than live a life of lies."

.
My engagement is broken.

Hector has gone, never to come back.

Here is the letter which was brought to my room where, almost unconscious, I returned after the service.

"Jeanne,—God has not granted my prayer and enlightened your heart. There is only one means to propitiate Him—the sacrifice of my life, the sacrifice of my love. I submit to His will. An atheist (my heart bleeds in giving you that name) who denies Revelation, the authority of the Divine Book, cannot be the wife of a minister of God. To continue to

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see you, to feel the charm of your presence, would be impossible. . . . I am only a man, a man who loves you with all his heart, and soul and body. . . . From afar as near, O my loved one, my prayers shall follow you, my supplications shall mount to the God of Justice who is also the God of Mercy. He will break down the barrier of your pride and lead you to His feet. I am writing to my mother to explain my departure. Love her, my dear mother, who loves me so dearly; soften by your affection the grief she will feel . . . be to her the daughter she hoped to find indeed in you.

"Adieu, Jeanne, my beloved. I confide you to His care. "HECTOR."

My poor Aunt Molly! Her heart will be broken!

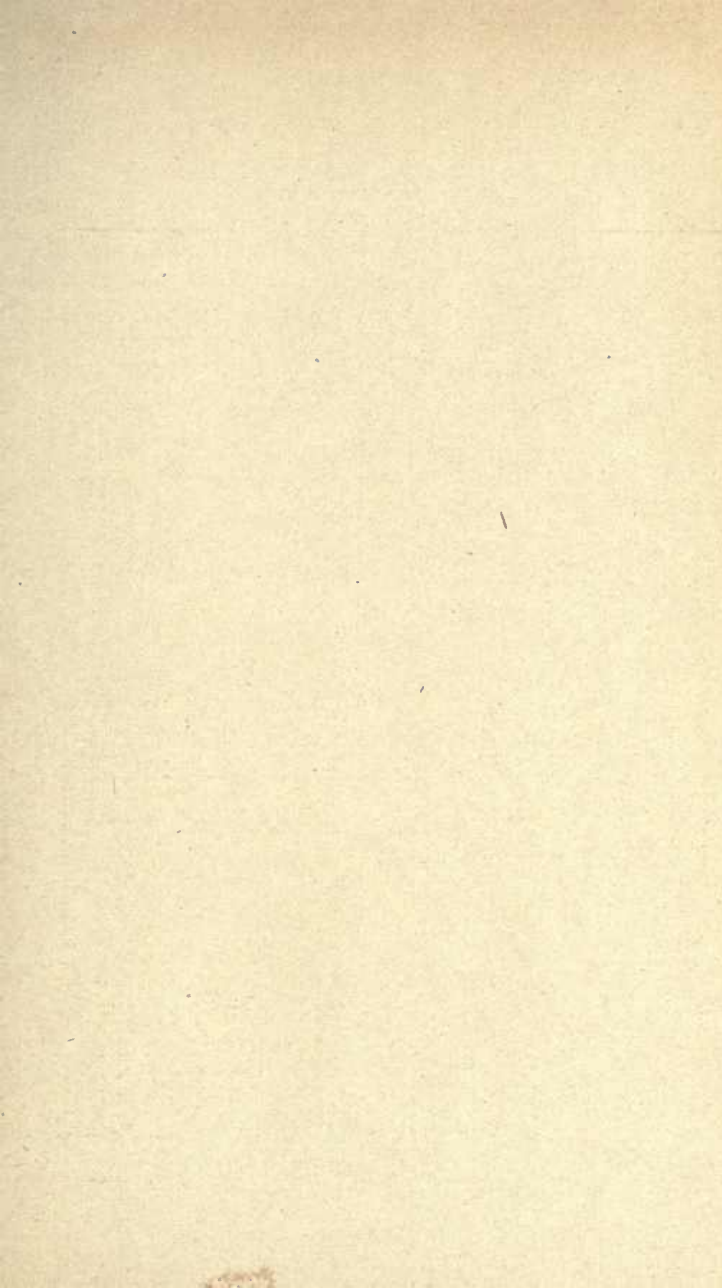
PART II

XII

Storm Signals

Nous nous imaginons, Pauvres fous que
nous sommes,
Que personne avant nous n'a connu la
Douleur.

ALFRED DE MUSSET.





MAC'S COTTAGE.

How shall I recount the long months of gloom and sadness following Hector's departure for Molokai?

After reading the letter which ended everything between us, I ran to my guardian imploring him to let me return to France.

"The Directrice of the Lycee where I was educated was my mother's friend. I know she will receive and aid me to obtain a position in the administration of which she is the head."

But my uncle was unwilling for me to go.

Mrs. Deslandes, whom I sought afterwards, drew me into her arms.

"It would be useless, little Jeanne. Hector will never return," she said, with her sweet, melancholy smile. "It was only my selfish affection that kept him here preventing entire devotion to his calling. Yes, it is better so," she added, with that pious resignation which enables her to support all blows uncomplainingly. "God calls him; I will not dispute possession."

How beautiful is this Christian Faith animating mother and son! How profound, despite the narrowness of its principles! How comforting and sustaining in the dark hours of tribulation!

.

THE BLACK PEARL.

My uncle has touched the right chord to make me remain at Gwylata.

"Jeanette, your presence here may be really helpful. Bad times threaten, my poor little girl. Almost all my speculations have turned out badly. . . . The bank holds a mortgage on the station and is pressing me. . . . Perhaps we shall need you, if we have to economise and discharge some of the servants.

"The cook goes first," he resumed, smilingly. "Why, we shall have a French 'chef,' who will prepare for us some dainty little dishes," his unquenchable cheerfulness reasserting itself at once.

"Don't be frightened. I am only joking. We shall not be so poor as all that. I am counting on the Golden Egg mine to put things right. If dividends are forthcoming we shall soon be richer than before. . . . Oh, yes! there still remain some 'beaux jours' for us, Jeannette."

And my poor uncle, comforted already by his optimistic hopes in the great mine, begins to build airy castles.

Life on the station has resumed its monotonous course, broken only by Hector's letters from his far-off island in the South Seas, that leper station, with which Father Damien's name is so indissolubly connected.

THE BLACK PEARL.

He writes of his work among the miserable pariahs, of the devoted band of helpers—Catholics, priests and sisters, ministers, and American doctors, all united in the great work of Charity.

.
Daisy's visits prove a great distraction. She alone has the power to draw me out of my melancholy. She is so bright and fresh, brimful of health and happiness. Her marriage is to take place shortly, sooner than was anticipated. By what she calls "good luck," the bank was broken into by burglars. Dick, hearing a suspicious noise, fired several shots from the revolver he always kept near him—"without hitting anyone," as Daisy naïvely remarked, very glad not to have a "spook" between her lover and herself. The neighbours, awakened by the shots and the noise of the struggle, secured one of the assailants.

Dick escaped with only a scratch on the temple, where a bullet grazed the skin. Daisy is quite proud of the wound, and prouder still of the congratulations showered on the hero of the hour for his courage and presence of mind. As a tangible recognition of his services he is to be promoted.

"Perhaps he'll be manager, instead of clerk. The salary will be doubled," says the girl, with an important air.

THE BLACK PEARL.

I tease her for being so mercenary. She opens her clear blue eyes, the hue of wet periwinkles, and answers in a tone which reduces me to silence.

"If Dick is promoted, we can be married sooner."

Meg also does her best to divert my thoughts. She has asked me to look after Bahloo in the mornings, as she is obliged to be in closer attendance on her mistress. In spite of her fine, unflagging courage, her son's absence and the danger he incurs from the dread disease around him have seriously affected my poor aunt's health. So I undertake Bahloo's education. I find the funny "petit noir" has quick intelligence, and an excellent memory, especially for figures. He is astonishingly quick at mental arithmetic. I am told that it is only a flash of intellectual activity, that towards the age of 10 or 12, the faculties of the aboriginal begin to diminish and finally atrophy, rendering it impossible to go far with the mental training that begins so promisingly. The more man rises in the scale of human development, the more necessary becomes time for his nascent intelligence to evolve. A little chick or a duckling is so much more lively than a babe.

My little native charge amuses and interests me with his chatter. He knows so many le-

THE BLACK PEARL.

gends of his tribe—that of the laughing jack, the dingo, and the Pleiades, that mysterious constellation which plays so great a part in the mythology of primitive races.

The expected catastrophe has arrived, more sudden and overwhelming than anyone could have foreseen.

Two letters were brought to Mr. Deslandes one day just as we had finished lunch. The first, from the bank, brought the frown I know so well on his face; the second bore the heading of the unfortunate mine. After perusing the latter, my uncle uttered a groan, staggered, and fell heavily to the ground.

Our efforts to restore consciousness were unavailing. The doctor, summoned from Strathalbyn, arrived only to find life extinct.

The blow was too sudden. My dear aunt sank under the shock, and we had the sad consolation of laying in the same tomb these two beings so united in life.

I shall not dwell on this mournful period—the only things which sustain me in my grief are the sympathy and affection of those around me.

Mr. Brown and Dick have spared me the ordeal of the necessary formalities. A cable from Hector, who could not have arrived in

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time, had he been able to start at once, has given me full powers.

Daisy and her mother have been tenderness itself. The grief of all who work on the station, some grown old in the service of their beloved master and mistress, has affected me deeply, and been a great consolation in my distress.

.

The station is sold. The price covers the mortgage and the debts contracted during the last years of my uncle's life, when all his credit was used to pay up the calls of the miserable mine. A small sum remains, sufficient to assure the future of some of the old servants, of Meg and her husband, on whom Mrs. Deslandes had intended to settle a small annuity.

Mr. Saunders, the lawyer engaged in liquidating the estate, thinks it madness on my part to give up this money, but the obligation is as sacred to me as a debt. How can I permit these poor souls to go to the Destitute Asylum while I enjoy the money promised to them?

Hector has devoted his small patrimony to the work to which he has consecrated his life. In his last letter he speaks of his experiments about to be tried in the laboratory which he has had fitted up in order to seek a remedy to the frightful disease. I will not trouble him

THE BLACK PEARL.

with these worldly cares, from which he seems to be gradually detaching himself.

Many proffers of assistance reach me. Daisy, married during those wearying months occupied in the settling of my uncle's affairs, has entreated me to make my home with her. A room is always ready for me in the pretty cottage at Wellington.

I have been staying with Daisy's parents. They insisted on my leaving the great empty house. But I do not want to tax their hospitality. Their own future is precarious. Perhaps the new owner of Gwylata may not retain the old manager? If so, it may be difficult to find another position at his age.

Other friends of my uncle have written, offering an asylum and material help. People are warm-hearted and generous in Australia, where life is easy. But I am young and strong, and I shall find some means of gaining a livelihood in this new land to which I am becoming daily more attached.

Mr. Saunders, the lawyer, who still retains his interest in me, in spite of what he calls my foolishness, has just brought me a letter from his niece, Mrs. Clarke, whom I met at Strathalbyn, during the Hunt Club meet. It was she, I remember, who defended Mr. Russell so warmly.

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She offers me a position as governess to her small children, if the journey to New South Wales does not frighten me.

"The house is very modest," says Mr. Saunders; "the place is really only a large farm. My niece is not rich, but you know her, and she will make you happy. Your business methods are about on a par, so you should suit each other admirably!"

I have bidden a tender "adieu" to all my Gwylata friends, including little Bahloo, who weeps bitterly. Dick and Daisy are to escort me as far as Murray Bridge, where I take the Melbourne Express.

Once again we three glide along the smooth waters of the great river. My thoughts return to the first time I saw the noble waterway of Australia, the day I fled from Gwylata to escape Allan Russell's visit.

How far off it all seems! What trouble have I not been through since then!!!

Away with sad thoughts! A new life is beginning, unknown, but full of possibilities.

XIII

At Anchor

The alternative of light and darkness
must continue as long as we live in this
world of illusion.

—“On the Threshold.”

Gum trees!!! For two days and nights I have been flying past their serried ranks, as the train rushes on through Victoria and New South Wales. I begin to sympathise with the little Globe-Trotter whom my uncle could never persuade to go for a walk or, indeed, any sort of excursion.

"Go out! What for? Just to look at your old gum trees. Thanks! One gum is rather interesting; it has even a certain distinction and individuality, but thousands upon thousands, millions upon millions, and nothing else but your everlasting gum trees!"

Can it be really true, as I have been assured, that the eucalypti, like the pines, are reservoirs of the vital force of the sun which they radiate in torrents of rose-coloured atoms, pouring strength and vitality into the atmosphere surrounding them. How precious they would be were the idea accepted!

What a sanatorium Australia would become for the poor anaemic humanity of the old world! What an inexhaustible storehouse of health and energy!

.
Mrs. Clarke, who meets me at Oberon, is indeed a charming woman. Simple and un-

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affected, she treats me at once as a friend. She is happy in her homely life on the big farm, which she manages in her husband's absence. Mr. Clarke had been obliged to go to England to settle a question of succession.

The children are darlings : Lucille, an angel of six ; Jack, a little demon of five, dowered with an inexhaustible energy and mischievousness which keep us breathless until he is safely tucked up in his cot at night. The mother is bringing them up in true Australian fashion, which certainly has the merit of allowing individuality to develop unhampered.

Just now they are very interested in the Bible stories their nursemaid tells them every morning, and in their enthusiasm they dramatize them, which leads occasionally to unexpected catastrophes.

The other day at lunch time Lucille was missing.

After an hour's fruitless search, Jack confessed that she was in the old dry well.

"In the well?" we exclaimed, horrified.

"Ye-e-e-s; we was playin' Joseph and his brudders. I was de *only* brudder," added the young rascal, regretfully. "I made her go down de well and den I pulled up de rope, so she tuddn't det out."

Leaving nurse to exhaust her vocabulary on

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the youthful reprobate, we hurried to the well, not very deep, happily.

To Kate's call a small voice came up :

"Is you the 'Gyptian merchants?"

One of the farm hands descended, and picked up the child enveloped in an Indian curtain of many colours.

Mrs. Clarke put her histrionic offspring to bed without further ado, Lucille to get warm, for she was shivering with cold, and Master Jack to punish him.

He looked so angelic in his long white nightgown that one could never suspect the diabolical ideas which enter his little brain.

With hands meekly folded and innocent eyes raised heavenward, he lisped: "Pease take care of father, mamma, Lulu, and Jeanne—but not nurse," he added, with a resentful glance at the maid.

For some days Lucille has been playing a rather mysterious game. While Jack is having his afternoon sleep, she sits down in a certain corner of the room to play with her dolls.

Entering unperceived a day or two ago, I heard her put questions and give answers, as though she were talking to a companion. She made gestures, nodded and seemed very interested in her conversation.

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Catching sight of me, she made a sign to arrest my advance. Then, running towards me, said :

"Betty is very shy. She won't say a word when anyone is here."

"Betty?" I replied, inquiringly, lending myself to the game.

"Yes, my little friend. She comes every day to play with me when Jack is asleep. She does not like Jack; he is too rough," she explains, shaking her little head. "Betty loves you, pretty well, but she always hides when anybody comes into the room. That's her hiding place," pointing to a crack in the panelling, which had given a little with the heat.

The child evidently has too much imagination. I must speak to her mother about it.

To-day I find Lucille in tears when I enter the day nursery to give her a French lesson. Nurse is angry, and is scolding her severely.

"It's wicked of you, Miss Lucille, to tell stories like that."

"It isn't a story," protests the child; "Betty was there just now, and you made her go when you began to scold me."

"Look, Miss Jeanne," continues the maid, turning towards me, "this naughty little girl declares that there was another child in the room with her. Isn't it wicked of her to tell such stories. God will punish her."

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Lucille's body stiffens. She says nothing more, but rebellious sobs shake her small frame.

I try to pacify nurse, and when she has gone away, muttering that I spoil the child, I take Lulu on my knees. She nestles lovingly into my arms and whispers :

"You *do* believe me, don't you? Betty *was* there, and . . . why, there she is again," holding her little arms, her face brightens, her large eyes shine with excitement.

She is not lying; she really does see some one.

I try to explain that grown-ups cannot always see what children see.

"You must not blame nurse, darling; tell me what your little playmate says."

Then follows a strange converse wherein Lucille acts as interpreter to a little child invisible to all except herself. . . .

When the children have been put to bed, I tell Mrs. Clarke what has passed. She seems less surprised than I had expected.

"Yes, I have noticed that Lulu is not quite as other children. Her soul is too evolved for its frail tenement. At times it breaks the veil between the astral and spiritual worlds. Lucille then finds herself in communion with the beings who live and move on the plane which interpenetrates ours."

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My blank look of amazement betrays my utter ignorance of Kate's meaning. She proceeds to tell me of the psychical studies which in the last decade have pulled down the barriers between the material and the invisible world. She quotes the words of Sir Oliver Lodge : "We are beginning to hear now and again, the strokes of the pick-axes of our comrades on the other side." She hands me some Theosophical reviews and articles on Psychical Research.

I exclaim : "What, you ! a sensible woman, believe in theosophy, that mixture of old superstitions and new-fangled notions, as my uncle used to term it."

"It is because I *am* a sensible woman," Kate replies, "that I am a theosophist. If you had studied this science as much as I have, you would speak of it with more consideration."

For the next hour, she talks on until the strange words, Re-incarnation, Karma, astral bodies, and Devachan begin to dance in my poor brain like a juggler's balls. . . . My eyes close, I lose the thread. . . .

"Please excuse me, dear ; I forget everything once I am on this topic. It is getting late, and you are dead tired." Kissing me, she adds :

"To-morrow, we will consider what to do

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with Lucille. Perhaps together we may evolve some means of minimising the influence of the phenomena which over-excites her brain. When she reaches the age of seven, the door now half-open to the invisible world will probably close outright. Meanwhile, take this little book, written by Will Canton, 'The Invisible Playmate,' wherein you will find an analagous case."

In my room, Kate's words return to me. Can it be true? Does another world, invisible to our grosser perceptions interpenetrate this?

The idea fascinates and scares me at the same time.

But no, no, I will not dwell on these religious questions. They have cost me too dear in the past. Neither will I read the books.

After a troubled night, wherein astral bodies, elementals and various sorts of "spooks" indulge in terrific combats, I am brought abruptly back to realities.

In the weekly paper, "The Australasian," which I open after breakfast, is an account of a sensational divorce suit. A name catches my eye, and makes my heart beat almost, it would seem, before my brain could register the impression.

What is this strange sub-consciousness which acts on the human organism, often in spite of ourselves, making the blood recede

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and the knees tremble at the sight of a name, the memory of a glance?

I must read it now. The affair is sordid. An indulgent husband, deceived by a silly wife, not for love's sake, for the co-respondents are many, but through sheer idleness and vanity, the desire to be considered "smart," to wear extravagant toilets utterly beyond her husband's means. Allan Russell's name appears among the admirers of the frail beauty.

Mrs. Clarke enters and I pass her the paper, in silence.

Her face grows grave.

"Poor Allan! What a wasted life!"

"You pity him! It seems to me he has just what he deserves."

"Alas, Jeanne, we all get what we deserve—which fact doesn't make it a whit easier to bear."

I cannot refrain from pursuing the subject.

"You know Mr. Russell well, then?"

"Yes; and a more open and generous nature was never spoilt by a bad, heartless woman."

"Allan was the son of my mother's best friend," Mrs. Clarke continues. "Our stations were not far from each other, and we grew up like brother and sister. I believe," she adds, smiling, "that our parents wouldn't have objected to see a more tender affection between us. But Allan was at least a year

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my junior, and I always looked on him as a mere boy. He confided to me the great passion which his mother's companion had inspired in him. This woman, ten years Allan's senior, who had a past as we discovered later on, used all her skill and experience to infatuate the young man, alternately repelling and encouraging his advances, until she had him wholly in her power. She played with his feelings as a virtuoso does with a violin. A secret marriage was arranged."

"That is easy here, isn't it? A visit to the Registrar and the affair is settled," I interpolated.

"Sometimes to one's cost—certainly to my poor friend's. Allan's parents refused to receive his wife, so, possessing ample means—a fact of which the lady had carefully assured herself—he took her to London. Then began a life which to Allan soon became martyrdom. Vicious and utterly heartless, she dragged her husband with her into the mire, deceiving him for the sake of lovers as depraved as herself. The inevitable separation happened at the end of a few years, which had warped Allan's nature and turned him into a bitter and disillusioned man, believing neither in woman's virtue nor man's honour."

"Could he not have divorced her?"

"Allan was too proud then to let his name

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be dragged before the Court. In a moment's compassion—there is still a strain of chivalry in Allan, despite his cynicism—he promised not to divorce her if she would consent never to follow him. He made ample settlements on her which suffice for her numerous gratifications—the wretched being has added drunkenness to her other vices—but she has sense enough to abide by the contract, and passes her time in England or on the Continent, that is when she isn't in an inebriate "retreat."

"So that is why Mr. Russell came back to Australia?"

"Yes, but fettered. Tired of the loneliness of the bush, and hopeless of happiness, he threw himself into speculations with all the ardour of his temperament. His ventures succeeded, and now he is one of the richest men in the colonies, the leader of the 'smart set.' Poor Allan! Two things might save him. A duty to accomplish, or a noble love which would rescue him from this life of idleness and pleasure."

Shall I tell Kate of the impression he has made upon me? His resemblance to the Rajah of my dreams? With her peculiar beliefs, she might be able to give me an explanation. . . . No! I dare not! She would jeer at my susceptibility, perhaps. . . and then he is married, and to that creature!

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I can quite understand now why he left without trying to see me a second time.

.
A letter from Hector brings the ever-dreaded news. He has fallen a victim to the terrible scourge. It is only a question of time. He states it quite simply. He is almost happy. He feels closer to the unhappy beings around him. He can say to them, as Father Damien did: "We lepers."

Oh, my poor Hector! To what suffering are you not doomed.

I am writing, entreating to be allowed to join him, to share his work, to tend him as a sister, as a wife if he wills it.

XIV

The Jenolan Caves

Oh ! quelle étrange nuit sous l'univers
sonore

Un trou s'offre lugubre. Il y plouge et
rampant.

Dans un vide où l'effroi du tombeau se
répand

Il voit sous lui de l'ombre et de l'horreur
Il est dans je ne sais quel intérieur
d'autre encore.

Ses enchevêtrements de racines vivaces
Ses fuites d'eau mouillant de livides cre-
vasses.

Il frauchit tout ; des reins, des coudes,
des talons.

Il pousse devant lui l'abîme et dit :
"Allons !"

VICTOR HUGO.

Jack and Lulu run boisterously into my room, shouting :

“We’re going to the Caves. We’re going to the Caves ! Mother says so !”

Jenolan is the wonderland of the Blue Mountains. Its vast caves equal, if they do not excel, the most famous ones of the world.

Mrs. Clarke has organised an excursion there of several days’ length. “It will be good for Lulu,” says she, and distract her attention from her mysterious little visitant, who, you will see, won’t follow her. These influences adhere as much to places as to people.”

I know my kind friend is actuated also by the desire to divert my thoughts from myself and relieve my anxiety until Hector’s reply can reach me.

I am only too delighted to have the chance of visiting these Caves, of which I have heard so much. Formed long ages ago, in a limestone belt, by the action of water, which, percolating gradually through the soft stone, at length crashed down the barriers, and, boiling and seething, carved out immense caverns, fantastic grottoes and recesses, they are now adorned with glistening stalagmites and stal-

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actites, transforming them into an Aladdin's Palace.

Our guide, "Jerry," is what they call here a "Character." He considers himself the territorial Lord of everything pertaining to the Caves. Certainly he has discovered the greater part of them, and he does the honours to tourists from all parts of the world.

Deaf as a post, he abuses his position by uttering whatever comes into his head in highly coloured language of which I cannot hope to receive the full savour. One can't very well snub him. Yelling into a trumpet would scarcely convey an impression of offended dignity.

In justice, I ought to say that his gruffness is only superficial. He would risk his life to spare his tourist visitors a scratch.

Following his usual custom, Jerry gives each of us a sobriquet.

"Life is too short," says he, "to learn the names of the people I shall likely enough never see again."

So Mrs. Clarke is "Mother," I am "Brown Eyes," nurse is "Sulky" (her looks evidently have not pleased him), Lulu is "Little Fairy," and Jack "The Imp."

A good judge of character is Jerry.

We are conducted into the largest of the Caves, which descends more than a thousand

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feet, and is reached by a series of subterraneous passages and vast halls. The Imperial Cave, the Cathedral, the Exhibition Room, all lit by electricity, are full of the most enchanting marvels, statues, pillars, marble columns, frozen cataracts, glistening pendants from the vaulted roof, walls encrusted with gleaming jewels reflecting all the colours of the prism. One might imagine oneself in the palace of the Genii, where rubies, topazes and diamonds rival each other in lambent fire. In one gallery, stalagmites, shot with the chatoyant hues of an agate, fall in a frieze, some six feet in thickness.

Other formations when struck give forth the deep harmonious roll of an organ fitted for a race of Titans.

Jerry's great pleasure is to seat us with a stern injunction not to move, and then suddenly switch off the electric light.

The horror succeeding our vision of fairyland is inexpressible. The darkness is corporeal, palpable. One actually feels the vast material solidity separating us from the blue sky. The terror is heightened by the resonance of the air. The slightest sounds are magnified. Jerry throws some stones into the abysmal depths near us. A long, long time after, we hear their impact with the stream which threads its tortuous course below.

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The children cling to us affrightedly, but our magician switches on the current, and once more we are in the palace of the fairies.

A little incident marks the beginning of our excursion. At the entrance of a cave our guide shows us the imprint of a snake on the wet sand in the hollow of a rock. "You needn't be afraid. They only come out at night after the bats, which swarm here in myriads."

The dimly lit gallery, where we sit down to rest after the fatigue of reaching the upper cave, is closed by an iron gate. Jack, leaning against it, utters a cry: "A snake! a snake!"

We all run, Jerry leading. Coiled round the iron points of the railing is a huge serpent.

"A carpet snake, be jabers, I'd like to take him alive. Light your candles!" orders our guide imperiously (it is advisable to carry candles in case of any mishap). We form a luminous circle; there are about fifteen of us, for some other tourists are being "personally conducted." Jerry loves to dominate a crowd.

The snake lies inert, simulating sleep.

"He has eaten too many bats and forgotten the danger of his whereabouts, or else he has climbed up there to get them on the wing." Jerry, while speaking, has made a running knot in a piece of rope which he fixes to the end of a stick.

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Approaching cautiously, he endeavours to throw it over the snake's head. But his majesty, now alive to his danger, draws back each time. The play (scarcely play to me or the reptile) lasts a long time. At each sinuous movement we retreat warily. But Jerry is relentless.

"The lights, the lights!" he exclaims, and, willy-nilly, we reform the magic circle. Finally a less swift movement of the victim results in the cord being drawn taut. He hisses, slowly uncoils, and is dragged off in triumph.

"A windfall for me," remarks our guide; "they'll give me ten bob for him at the Zoo."

It is a young carpet snake, five feet long, beautifully marked on top and silvery underneath.

There is something artlessly artful about Jerry.

Among our number is a young man with a retreating facial angle and a weak chin. Jerry, in the coolest manner possible, calmly hands him the snake-wound stick to carry. He takes it gingerly, with inward trepidation, but afraid to show the white feather too openly.

Jerry strides on in front with an unconcerned air, belied by a suspicious glint in the corner of his eye.

The timid young man, with his living "caduceus," is left to bring up the rear, a

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position to which he is speedily relegated by the shrinking of his companions when he approaches too closely. Apparently no thought of resisting Jerry's masterful action occurs to him.

.
In the evening the heat is stifling. We have carried our chairs to the verandah to enjoy the slight breeze wafted from the mountains. The children, tired out with the day's pleasures, are lying on cushions at our feet. The sky is covered with threatening clouds. Suddenly, one by one appear little twinkling lights. They are fire-flies, flitting from tree to tree, honouring our visit by a fairy illumination.

The following days bring new excitements, new marvels, subterranean rivers, ascensions on rope ladders, and spiral staircases, which lead from cave to cave.

"We shan't see them all," says Jerry, "for 30 miles or so they penetrate the interior of the mountains, forming endless circuits and detours. Even I don't know them all (words fail to give adequate expression to that pronoun), and I have been on the job forty years or so."

Jerry alternates his guide book English with a slangy colloquialism.

No, nor are we likely to see the "hairy man," the monster whom he has chased so

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many times, and whose footprints he has marked in almost inaccessible places.

Is there really a mystery here, I wonder, or is it some freak of Jerry's vivid imagination?

He swears by all the gods that there is such a monster. Others have seen him, fired at, and wounded him, too, which in no wise impeded the remarkable agility with which he used to appear and disappear.

To finish, Jerry takes me to the top of the mountain. A rocky arch, crowned with gum trees, dominating the valley at our feet, where the towering Eucalypts, over hundreds of feet high, look no bigger than small shrubs.

Their tops touch each other, interlace and form a carpet of sombre velvet. Strangling trails of foliage hang from the rocks; tree ferns wave their graceful fronds in the hollows, and orchids, with quaint faces, nod in the crevices, slenderly detached against the abysmal background of green and russet.

My eyes, unaccustomed to dizzy heights, become dazzled, my brain reels, I feel faint, giddy. . . . I gladly leave these altitudes to the Australian eagles, which, disturbed in their eyries, fly off, uttering discordant shrieks as they wheel in the splendour of the unshadowed blue.

Alone

Support with patience thy lot, be it
what it may, and never repine at it.

(“The Golden Verses of Pythagoras.”)

“No, I cannot accept your sacrifice,” writes Hector. “I cannot allow you to join me. “You, here at Molokai! You, among the lepers! Think of your youth, your beauty, which would become the prey of this unclean evil. . . . Love only could sanction so great a renunciation. Do not be hurt, dear Jeanne, my little sister, if I say that you mistake pity for love. You do not love me; you have never loved me. . . . I am glad of it now, dear. Your life will not be broken. I thank God for that every day, and pray Him to send you the man who will make you happy, the man whom you will really love. . . . In touch with so much suffering, I have found the Real. Many illusions are swept away, many veils torn aside. I recognise now, dear, that those dogmas which separated us are merely forms clothing the Eternal Verities, roads leading to the Great Light. Working with these men and women, priests and Catholic nuns, disciples of Damien, American missionaries, doctors toiling for the love of Science in the cause of humanity, all meeting here from far off lands, divided in creed, yet united by Charity, I have felt how illusionary our differences really are. We are all

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children of God, walking in the darkness towards the same goal, the same Divine end. . . . Do not weep for me. Live your life; it is so full of promise. . . . For me, I am happy in the task I have undertaken. What matter my sufferings, which afflict you so much? They will only endure for a little while. What is that compared with Eternity? One day, my little sister, we shall be uplifted beyond the travail of human passions, reunited in the bosom of the God of Infinite Goodness."

.
Hector is right. I feel I should never be able to give him my whole heart, devote to his work the life which in a moment's exaltation I have offered him. I could never bear it. The bare thought makes me shudder with horror.

.
Something has happened which diverts my thoughts from Hector and myself.

Mrs. Clarke and the children are going to England.

The succession business is dragging slowly along and Mr. Clarke is tired of being alone. Kate wants me to remain at the farm or go with her. I cannot accept either proposition. What good would there be in remaining here? On the other hand, why put her to the additional expense of taking me? She can hardly afford it, I know.

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I will accompany her as far as Melbourne, where she embarks. There, in that large and wealthy city, surely I shall find something to do until her return in six months, a year at the most.

We arrive in Melbourne just in time to catch the White Star liner in which Mrs. Clarke has booked her passage.

The hurried train journey, the bustle of embarkation, and the farewells to my dear friend and her children, who carry away a good part of my heart, prevent me from dwelling too much on myself.

Only when the steamer turns, and a stretch of blue water broadens between us do I begin to feel my desolation.

Utterly alone in a strange city, without a friend, and destitute of resources except the small sum of money Mrs. Clarke has pressed upon me as payment for lessons! Bah! I am young. Something is sure to happen. My first disappointment comes when I find the boarding-house recommended by Kate quite full. It is race week, Melbourne's great carnival, and every hotel and lodging house is overflowing. I try another, only to receive the same reply, "Not a room to let." At last, after several hours of fruitless research, dropping with fatigue, and conscious of an insane feel-

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ing that I shall have to spend the night at some street corner, seated on my valise, I come upon a very third or fourth rate boarding house. The charges, however, are by no means commensurate, and seem very large for my modest purse. To a timid protest the landlady points to the door, and I hasten to pay a fortnight in advance. Her hard, hatchet-like features relax a little at sight of a few sovereigns in my purse. Helas ! they constitute my whole fortune. She precedes me to a tiny room at the back of the house.

And now to find pupils before my means are exhausted.

The moment is not opportune, it seems.

"The year is too far gone to make new arrangements." "Call again, or wait and leave your address, and I will write," is the invariable reply to my inquiries.

It is easy to say "Wait," but I cannot wait very long.

Somebody advises me to advertise. It is an additional expense, and I am not much enamoured of the practice. I remember one day at Gwylata my uncle showing me an advertisement for a tutor for two boys up country.

The requirements were : "English, Algebra, Latin, Elementary French, and Music. A young man able to *milk cows* preferred."

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Perhaps I might be asked to groom the horse or do the cooking.

But the cutting was from an old newspaper. Times have changed since then.

So next morning a notice appears in *The Argus* to the effect that a young Parisienne is ready to impart instruction on reasonable terms.

After waiting anxiously a few days I receive two answers.

The first, written on paper highly perfumed with musk, doesn't seem too encouraging. The second is from a Mrs. Forrest, who lives at St. Kilda, and will see me between five and six.

The first would certainly suit me better as far as distance is concerned, for the address is East Melbourne. I could easily walk to and fro and so save car fares. I decide to apply.

Arriving at the street mentioned, I ask a policeman to show me the house. He does so, giving me a rather peculiar look. He seems on the point of speaking further, but checks himself, muttering :

"It's her business."

Yes, it is my business, and badly am I equipped to meet it.

The door is opened by a small boy in buttons. He favours me with an insolent stare, then precedes me up a neglected looking stair-

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case. In the corridor a door opens and two young girls thrust out their heads inquisitively.

The boy points at me, grinning, "Another!"

The room into which I am shown is in disorder. The furniture is showy, the colours glaring. The air is redolent with a mixed odour of heavy perfumes, tobacco and spirits, and nearly chokes me.

I feel instinctively that this is no place for me, and I turn to go, when the door opens, and a tall, stout woman bearing the remains of past beauty, enters and begs me to be seated.

She speaks volubly. She is charmed to meet me. She wants someone to give French lessons to herself and her two nieces (the two young girls of the corridor, I presume). She questions me closely. Learning that I am alone in Melbourne, she smiles and becomes quite friendly. Too much so, it seems to me. Her affable "My dears" are positively nauseating.

She wants me to come and live with her. They lead a very gay life, go frequently to the theatre, and have many "gentlemen friends."

The more pressing she becomes, the more I shrink and hesitate.

"*Jeanne fait sa tortue*" my poor uncle used

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to say when I retreated into my shell at the advances of anyone antipathetic.

The oily, persuasive voice grows insistent. The question of payment is waved airily aside.

"Oh, that doesn't matter. We'll come to some satisfactory arrangement after you've been here for a while." She purposes sending immediately for my luggage. I decline to allow her, saying that I should like a little time to reflect before coming to a decision. I am beginning to feel ensnared. Everything is repugnant to me—the coarse luxury, the disorder, the smooth craftiness and much too ingratiating manners of this woman, the atmosphere of the house itself. . . .

I do not breathe freely until I regain the street, followed by the protestations and regrets of the lady.

The policeman is still at hand. He accosts me.

"Are you going to return to that house, Miss?"

"No, certainly not."

"That's all right, then, Miss. It isn't the place for a girl like you. The old woman ain't up to much. I don't trust her, so I stayed about to see if she'd keep you by force."

I thank my new-found friend, the Protector of innocence whose presence has saved me,

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perhaps from a dreadful fate, and I return to the boarding-house, trembling at the thought of the peril into which my inexperience has led me.

Before seeking the second address, I take the precaution to make some inquiries about Mrs. Forrest.

I am told that she is the wife of a retired shopkeeper, who has made a lucky coup on the Stock Exchange.

She gives herself important airs, and strives to have her name constantly at the head of fashionable bazaars, charity concerts, and balls.

She loves to feel herself in the public eye.

That matters little to me. Her household is honourable, that is sufficient. The outward aspect of the house is reassuring. A well-appointed footman shows me into a small room where his mistress is writing a letter.

She does not trouble to receive me, but continues her work.

After some minutes she deigns to turn.

"You are the young person who put an advertisement in the paper?" she queries, loftily, without asking me to sit down.

I feel myself redden. "Ah, my poor Jeanne, it will take you some time to get accustomed to the bread of dependence."

Repressing my annoyance, I draw forward

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an easy chair, sit down, and reply with calm politeness.

Mrs. Forrest looks at me in astonishment. However, possessing a fair share of astuteness, she takes in the situation and for the rest of the time assumes better manners. I am to come every day to teach her two little girls, and talk French with her. The salary she offers is sufficient to pay for my board and lodging and tram fares. Later on I hope to find employment for the afternoons.

The months will pass quickly. My dear Kate and the children will soon be back.

XVI

The
Boarding
House

“His years were young, but his experience old.”

SHAKESPEARE.

What a strange world in miniature a boarding house presents !

A world where dissimilar beings lacking the ties of friendship, education and intellect are united by circumstances in the trammels of a common existence. How utterly antipathetic is such a life to our French nature, to the intense reserve hidden under our frank and cordial manners which guard sacredly and invulnerably the "Famille Francaise," modern novels and plays to the contrary. If we have not the actual word "home" in our vocabulary—a favourite gibe of our foreign friends—we have a more intimate term still, "le Foyer," the hearth, which suggests the primitive cult, the fire worship of our ancestors—the *foyer*, which no one outside the family might touch.

Maybe that is the cause of our secret irritation and impatience when an acquaintance takes it upon himself to poke our fire. To us it seems presumption, an abuse of hospitality, to say nothing of the ingrained belief that no one but ourselves can make it blaze.

But this is a digression.

Let us return to the boarding house, our poor third-rate boarding house, with its inmates in respectfully appropriate keeping.

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First, there are the permanent boarders, among whom I have no specially delirious desire to be counted. A commercial traveller in a softgoods firm, who affects "genteel" manners. (What a horrid expression, genteel!) In other respects, a decent enough young man whose attentions don't annoy me too much. Already he has reposed certain sweet confidences in my ear, so that I shall not indulge in any false hopes as to his intentions, I presume.

He has been engaged for eight years!—eight years!—to a shop assistant, and they wait patiently and persistently until they have put by enough money to purchase a country store.

Every Saturday afternoon off they start for a township on a tour of inspection. Saturday succeeds Saturday; the years come and go in this life of long-deferred hopes.

Then there is, alas! a school mistress, no longer in the first bloom of her youth. Shall I ever, in the years to come, grow like her? Every morning she trudges to her little school. For years her life has been passed in teaching the rudiments of arithmetic and grammar. Apparently she possesses neither relatives nor intimate friends. All her energies, apart from her teaching, are directed towards religion and divers reforms. She belongs to several Guilds

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—the Young Women's Christian Association, the Women's League, the Social Purity and Temperance Leagues, etc., etc. Withal she is a kind-hearted, good woman, despite her many perfections of character, and does not utterly wither me when I decline to accompany her to "Meeting" on Sunday. All her spare time is taken up with committee work for the regeneration of feminine humanity. She doesn't concern herself with the *strong sex*. That may sink into the perdition it so richly merits. She has, of course, no time for a simple unit like me.

Another inmate is an old German employé in a lighting establishment, whether gas or electricity I know not. He appears at meals only on Sundays.

There are casual visitors, too, racing people mostly, but we scarcely see anything of them. The house is full, to the supreme exultation of Mrs. Johnson, the sour-visaged virago whose stony glare fixes us if we dare take more than our wee modicum of butter or sugar.

The sole ambition of her life is to get money. For what? Good heavens! Not for her dress, which is austere beyond description. Not for the benefit of her poor little son, whose life is a daily martyrdom. To save and pinch and scrape, she does all the work of the house herself, with the assistance of a little girl of four-

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teen, who waits at table. Her son cleans the boots and runs errands.

Rising before daybreak, she does the dining-room and the parlor, a horrid, stuffy room decorated with a horsehair suite, a round table surmounted by a monstrosity having the temerity to style itself wax flowers, glaring, shiny surfaced "chromos" on the walls, and a yellowish carpet on the floor. But the crowning horror is reached in the woollen and cotton crochet anti-macassars—a name as horrible as the articles themselves.

Billy Johnson is a small boy of twelve or thirteen. Ugly!—oh, so ugly—one is irresistibly reminded of the Simian theory. A veritable monkey, with elongated face, piercing, crafty eyes set close together, large ears, a flat nose and facial muscles never still for a moment. For the rest, a mischievous, inquisitive, 'cute young rascal, who knows everybody and everything. As soon as a new-comer is installed, the "little monkey," an apt nickname bestowed by the boarders, does not rest until he has ferreted out all there is to know. Up to the present I have succeeded in baffling him. But he is not at all discouraged. My only fear is that he may rummage my trunks and read my letters. Well, let him! there is no mystery in my simple life, though

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I should not like it bared to the gaze of the indifferent.

Billy, it seems, has taken a great liking to me, firstly because of the pity in my eyes when his mother ill-treats him, and secondly because I am French.

Not, indeed, that he loves the French. To him all foreigners are inferior beings whom it behoves a little Australian to despise, but because being French I must share his detestation of all "*Deutschers*." The German boarder is his "*bête noire*," the only being in the world who inspires him with terror. The German Invasion is the bugbear which causes him sleepless nights.

What tricks he plays on the inoffensive old man, who cannot be other than a "Prussian spy!" He confides his dire suspicions to my ears and the means whereby his plots may be circumvented.

My evenings are dull, so I am giving him lessons in French. He is very elated at his progress.

This morning everything is quiet in the house, the inmates are presumably at Church. Mrs. Johnson is in the kitchen preparing the Sunday dinner, the only meal at which we are allowed to satisfy our hunger.

I open my trunks to get some books and photographs to make my room look less for-

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lorn. The casket containing the necklace is among my treasures. I have never worn it since the night of my betrothal. It recalls too many painful and passionate memories. I love their pure milky beauty even while I fear the strange influence of the pearls. As I touch them caressingly, the door half-opens and Bill's touzled head frames itself in the aperture. There is no sanctuary from Bill, no spot sacred from his inquisitiveness. Catching sight of my open trunk, he enters, regardless of my remonstrances, pulling such a droll grimace that I have not the heart to put him outside.

"Oh, what boshter pearls, my word! They look like the real thing!"

"They *are* real pearls," I reply, thoughtlessly, without reflecting on the anomaly of such a necklace being in the possession of one of his mother's boarders.

"My word! Real pearls, eh!" exclaims Bill, putting unimaginable expression into his favourite exclamation, varying intonations of which depict faithfully the state of his mind.

"Yes, it's the real thing, and no mistake."

The "Little Monkey" is fancying himself a connoisseur in pearls as in everything else.

"Hide it well, miss; if mum sees it she'd twist your neck to get hold of it."

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"Oh, Bill! How can you speak like that of your mother?"

"It's the truth, Miss," nodding his head sapiently. "'Taint her fault, poor mum; she loves money like some loves drink. She'd risk her life (he says 'loife') for the money she'd get for them pearls. As for yours, she wouldn't think twice about it." Bill is right. I have surprised glints of almost criminal covetousness in her eyes when a boarder has worn a bit of jewellery.

However, on principle, I continue to scold Bill, who looks cautiously around, opens the door, winks in a knowing fashion, and placing his finger on his lips, murmurs dramatically,

"Hist! Hide the treasure! Silence and secrecy!"

The idea is worth acting upon. It would be safer to wear the necklace under my dress than leave it in my trunk.

I have had a troubled night, dream chasing dream through my restless brain, leaving only a chaotic jumble of impressions. Am I to ascribe it to the thoughts of yesterday, or to the influence of the pearls around my neck?

Allan Russell seemed to dominate them all, sometimes as he appeared the night of the ball, sometimes as the Rajah of India, and yet again assuming a personality of times more

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remote. Only one of these visions detached itself clearly. Two men, rough and ferocious in aspect, were fighting savagely. In the heat of the struggle the red hair tied on the top of their heads was tossed back mane-like on their shoulders. They hurled imprecations at each other in a sort of wild chant. I heard the clashing of their short swords. I seemed to contemplate the scene with a dull, apathetic gaze. Finally one was killed. The victor, advancing, cut the thongs which bound me and bore me off in his brawny arms.

The blue eyes plunged into mine were those of Allan Russell, the colouring was changed, that is all. The features were those of a Gael instead of the Rajah or the Australian squatter, but the same soul animated all three, the violent and passionate soul of the man who in my dreams pursues me with a love which one life could not quench.

.
I have just received a letter from old Meg, full of particulars about my Gwylata friends. Daisy's father is retained as manager, the new proprietor wishing to profit by his experience.

Meg and Mac have left the station.

"I could not stand," writes Meg, "seeing a silly little thing like her (it is thus she sums up the wife of the new squatter) flaunting about in my dear mistress's home. We are

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living at Wellington. Mac has bought a boat with part of the money you gave us, and Bahloo has become a fine fisherman."

Atavism, I suppose; all the Blacks love the water; not to the extent, though, of desiring to wash in it. Bahloo used to say, with a certain amount of reason, that it is only dirty people who want to wash; the others, being clean, need not.

Meg, however, was quite deaf to the ingenious line of reasoning, and the little man, despite his tearful protests, was scrubbed daily from head to foot.

"I'm not going to give anyone the chance of calling you 'a dirty little nigger,'" Meg used to say. It was the only bone of contention between them.

"Mac lets his boat on hire every Saturday," the letter continues. "Dick and Daisy, now married, often go for a row."

I let the letter fall. My thoughts revert to that day we spent on the river, the two lovers and myself. They, all in all to each other, I glad and sorry to have avoided Allan Russell. Where is he now? In Europe? Perhaps he is here in Melbourne, where Mrs. Clarke told me he has a house. I live such an isolated life, reading no newspaper, knowing nothing of the whirl of society life, except through the echoes which reach me at the house of Mrs.

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Forest, who herself lives on its frontiers, as well defined here as in the West End of London or the Old Faubourg St. Germain. The standard is different, rather lower, but the threshold is equally difficult to cross. Mrs. Forest is a "Climber," one who will arrive at the top by dint of much toadying, but the set to which she belongs has only the vices of the "Smart Set." The women composing it are always in a whirl, running from a luncheon to a bridge party, from a *matinée* to a sale, where their frivolous minds exhaust all their energy.

My little pupils, Sylvia and Gladys, are not bad children now, but will they grow up empty headed like their elders, gauging life only by its opportunities for wearing pretty dresses, having a good time, and spending the money their husbands get by every means—even honest ones.

The sovereign power of Mammon is already inculcated in these mites of five and seven years. They ask the price of everything given to them. The other day, Sylvia, who had just received a gold thimble as a reward for her first hem, proceeded immediately to weigh it on the letter balance in order to find out its exact value. What will become of these children 15 or 20 years hence, with hearts as dry and withered as that of their mother, who un-

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der her elegant exterior, hides a Shylockian soul ever demanding its pound of flesh?

"Show me your *grands airs*," demands Sylvia, one morning.

"What do you mean, *Chérie*?"

"Oh, Mamma said for all your '*grands airs*' she didn't pay you half as much as Bessy the cook. I would so like to see them."

I kiss the innocent, telling her that the "*grands airs*" are the protection of those who wish to keep their dignity. This leads to a long discussion on the word "dignity." The children adore long words. Their precocious Australian intelligence grasps the meaning of words without difficulty. If I could only take them away from this "*milieu*" of parade and appraisal where the meaner instincts of their little souls could not be further excited! The evil is not great yet, but a few hours daily is not sufficient to neutralise it.

I take up Meg's letter again. My thoughts have wandered sadly.

She finishes by telling me how comfortably they are able to live with the proceeds from the fishing, the boat and the little orchard around the cottage. She invites me diffidently, but I know how sincerely, to stay with them a little while. "You will really be in your own house, Miss Joan; we know quite well it was your money that bought it and that the lawyer ad-

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vised you to keep it yourself.” Mac sends his respects to Miss Mam’selle in a postscript. How it brings back the past ! Mac has taken the pledge, and has joined the Temperance Society. Bahloo would like to send me the big fish he caught before Meg sat down to write, and is quite unhappy when he is told that it won’t stand the journey. So he has to content himself with making a superb drawing of it on the margin of the letter. Kind souls ! Let them enjoy the few hundreds I gave them. It means abundance for them, the security of their old age. If things come to the worst, if I can no longer support the awful monotony of my life, I have my aunt’s pearls—the black one I will keep always. Is it not an heirloom ? And then—then—does it not open to me the ivory gate—the gate of beautiful dreams ?

XVII

La Dinette

Oh ! douce illusion, berce moi de tes
songes.
Demandant le bonheur à tes rians men-
songes
Je me sauve en tremblant de la réalité.

ALFRED DE MUSSET.

The boarding house is deserted. By a happy chance Bill and I are left in sole possession. I don't count the old German—"The Prussian Spy"—who is fast asleep in his room after his nocturnal duties. Miss Steele is at a tea-meeting, a semi-religious, semi-social function—(what a strange blend!)—given by one of her manifold societies.

The Commercial Traveller has gone with his perennial fiancée to inspect a store at Geelong. The landlady, by a miracle, is out for the day.

Her little drudge having left (they leave as soon as they come), she has gone into the country to interview a farmer's daughter, and get ocular proof that this much vaunted pearl possesses the virtues she demands but so far has never met. So Billy and I are quite alone. Some cold viands are in the pantry; we shall not die of hunger. The weather is delightful, one of those mild Australian days of early Autumn. The Southern breeze comes straight from the Pole; lingering over the Fitzroy Gardens, it reaches us laden with the rich perfume of flowers. It is good to be alive, to enjoy. Can I not forget my sordid surroundings just

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for a few hours? I have it. We will play a little comedy, Bill and I, "*Nous allons faire la Dinette.*"

First the preparations.

Followed closely by the "Little Monkey," I proceed to the florist's. That is the most important.

A big bunch of native boronia, for love of its exquisite scent, a big sheaf of white chrysanthemums, some autumn leaves and graceful, feathery fronds of asparagus ferns.

Then the fish shop. A tiny lobster and some oyster patties. Cream puffs, chocolate and sweets from the confectioner. I am nearly ruined, and Bill's arms are overflowing. Something is lacking still, but my purse is empty.

No! Here's a shilling in the middle pocket—not enough for bubbling champagne. Bill scratches his head for an idea.

"I know, Miss. Gimme the bob."

The slangy little urchin is never at a loss for long.

"They will gimme a arf pint bottle of claret at the pub. Wine of your country, Miss."

"Well, mind you get true Bordeaux; don't let them give you colonial wine."

Billy winks. I take the parcels and he is off in a trice.

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He will be clever who outwits this Australian gamin.

He is back in a few minutes, the neck of the precious little bottle peeping from his pocket. We return to Gipps-street.

Now for the transformation of the Parlor.

I throw all the atrocious antimacassars in a heap. The wax monstrosity and the mantel-piece ornaments (?) are deposited in Miss Steele's room. Opening my trunks, I unfold some oriental draperies and silken scarves.

Quickly, let us drape the hideous horsehair chairs and sofa upon which we have piled all the cushions of the house. Now the infamous oleographs. Cover them up with the autumn leaves and trails of asparagus. Billy enters into the fun with keen zest, and brings in a big earthenware pot for the white chrysanthemums. The dining-room cloth covers the painted cedar table, and we set out the *Dinette*.

"Oh, Billy, we have forgotten the lemon for the mayonnaise."

"Princess, you shall have it." This is the name he has bestowed on me since the episode of the pearl necklace. His brain, always in ebullition, has conjured up a whole series of thrilling adventures. He is fully persuaded that I am a princess in disguise, patronising

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his mother's abode for romantic reasons of my own.

Billy returns triumphantly with a lemon. Where has he unearthed it? From the room of some unfortunate lodger who indulges in "a night cap," the drink you must take going to bed, as Billy authoritatively informed me. Under his tutelage I shall soon know as much Australian slang as he of French.

I take the lemon without questioning aloud its mysterious appearance, only too happy to consider it a gift of the fairies, and quite determined to commit every crime, if necessary, to make the dinette complete.

The chrysanthemums are in the centre. The dessert plates are white fortunately, and innocent of the atrocious design on the dinner service. The boronia is placed at intervals in little bunches. I have kept some for my corsage and Billy's button-hole. Now for my toilette. What can I wear? Ah! the surah peignoir which used to so scandalise poor Meg. The very thing for the occasion. Quick, too, the silk stockings and high-heeled shoes which go with it. Here is my big feather fan, mounted in pale tortoise-shell, with my monogram carved on it. That will occupy Bill, who can fan me after the dinette.

But Bill! I must transform him also some-



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1900

BERTHE MOUCHETTE.

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how. He cannot remain in my enchanted palace in that horrible jacket.

One of my aunt's cashmeres. I pull it out and drape it around his shoulders, and wind a long white scarf spangled with silver around his head. He shall be the Genie of the Feast.

His queer simian features shining with repeated applications of soap and water look so droll under the turban that I dub him Hanuman on the spot. The name flatters him, and recalls vague recollections of the Arabian Nights. This book, picked up heaven knows where, and a copy of Sherlock Holmes compose his library, and are his favourite reading.

After the repast, to which we do full honour—I even suspect Bill of eating as *hors d'oeuvre* the full plate of sandwiches left for us by his mother—we uncork the little bottle of Bordeaux, and filling our glasses, drink to the fairies, to the benevolent Genii, and to the Prince who is to deliver the Princess from the prison of the wicked Enchanter.

That is Bill's idea, not mine.

Alas, the "Enchanter" is Destiny, and the "Prison" is Life. . . . No, no, no sad reflexions to-day; I want to enjoy every minute of it.

While Billy clears away the remnants of our feast—he is a treasure when he likes—I

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recline on the sofa, transformed for the nonce into a turkish divan, and give myself to reverie.

Hanuman brings me a pile of books, the legacy of various boarders. The title of one attracts me—The Flower of Forgiveness.

Opening it, I notice the scenes of the short stories are laid in India, the land of my golden dreams.

Bill has opened the bag of sweets, spread out the boronia on the cushions, and is now squatting on the floor in true Oriental fashion. He begins to fan me gravely with one hand, while the other dives into the bag at regular intervals to make the contents hold out longer.

The hours pass. The waning light grows too dim to read. I awaken Hanuman, who has fallen asleep at his post. The fairy story is over. The princess must don her black serge dress, the little genie his soiled jacket. Together we silently restore the room to its squalid order, put the monstrosity on the table, the crochet abominations on the chairs, and leave the blatant chromos in their native crudity.

There remain nothing of our enchanted hour but the great chrysanthemums and the suave, penetrating perfume of the dying boronia.

XVIII

Allan
Russell

“Our deeds carry their terrible consequences, consequences that are hardly ever confined to ourselves.”

GEORGE ELIOT (“Adam Bede.”)

A letter from Mrs. Clarke recalls me to the stern realities of life. She cannot return yet. Her husband's affairs, hindered by his illness, will keep them in England until the end of the year, perhaps longer.

Feeling wretchedly dejected, I wend my way to Mrs. Forest's.

.

The children have been detestable, owing, no doubt to my depression and the frightful headache caused by Kate's letter. At last, in despair and to avoid having to punish them, I let them chatter at their sweet will. There is an air of subdued excitement about the house. A visitor is expected at lunch.

"Un Monsieur tres chic, tres chic," says Sylvia, imitating her mother's expression. Gladys, who is practical, discloses the fact that heaps of delicious things are being prepared in the kitchen. Her little pink tongue passes appreciatively over her lips.

"There is going to be an iced *bombe* with passion fruit," she informs us, with a long-drawn Ah! of satisfaction.

Mrs. Forest does me the honour to rely on my taste, and asks me to arrange the flowers. The little girls help to remove the rose thorns. their tongues going busily all the time.

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"He has a big yacht as big as a ship," says Gladys, extending her small arms.

"Mamma went on board last week, and she says the saloon is gilded and panelled with pictures."

"Perhaps he will invite us too," returns Sylvia. "Mother says he adores children and insists on our remaining to lunch."

The flowers finished, I try in vain to coax my pupils back to their lessons. However, the gong sounds soon, and we are in our places. when Mr. and Mrs. Forest enter with—Allan Russell. I recognise him even before he turns round. His presence scarcely affects me. I am so accustomed to seeing him in my dreams. The luncheon begins. The governess is not deemed of sufficient importance to be presented. Replying to one of the children, he turns, and his eyes meet mine. A flame leaps into them, but Sylvia is between us, and he contents himself with bowing deferentially, and explaining to his astonished hostess—

"I have the honour to know Mademoiselle Deslandes. Her uncle was one of my dearest friends," he adds, with a look of sympathy as he notices my black dress. "I heard of his death during my last voyage to Europe. I was in your beloved Paris," he resumes quickly, to remove the impression of sadness

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his words have left on me. "It is always the same, gay and brilliant. You know Paris, do you not?" turning towards Mrs. Forest, who does not like being left out of the conversation, even for an instant.

He does not speak to me again. I follow his rapid, clever, and slightly cynical talk. I am fully conscious of the charm of the moment. Since my arrival in Melbourne I have never met *un homme comme il faut*. The guests of the boarding house can scarcely aspire to that title, and Mr. Forest, worthy man, when he finds time to lunch at home, only talks about Bulls and Bears, animals whose jumps and capers seem to interest him keenly.

I learn that Mr. Russell is due at Adelaide in a few weeks for the regatta. A race between his yacht and that of another squatter has been arranged. Turning towards the children, Mr. Russell invites them on board the "Sita" the following day.

"To-morrow is the garden-party at Government House," reminds Mrs. Forest, for whom these semi-official functions are the great events of life, the only chance she has of mingling with the "vrai monde," whose threshold she would fain cross. Smiling ironically, he replies,

"I am not invited. I am rather ostracised just now, you know. Virtuous people, it

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seems, would be contaminated by my presence. One must have a charitable heart like yours, dear Madam, to be willing to receive a hardened sinner like me."

"If you cannot come yourself," he resumes quickly, "perhaps Mademoiselle Deslandes would bring the children, and do me the honour of visiting the yacht. It would make up for the bad luck I had in going to Gwylata just the day you were out."

His rather mocking smile as he turns to me suggests that he saw through my motive in absenting myself.

"Or perhaps you are afraid of compromising yourself by being seen in such bad company, caressing the head of the little girl who has come to take the bonbons he has brought for her. You shall be a guarantee of my good conduct, Sylvia."

Why should I refuse? Am I not ostracised also by poverty and isolation? As to the danger the calmness with which I meet and talk to him assure me there is none now.

I accept the invitation, and we arrange the details of the visit, to which the girls look forward with frantic delight.

Luncheon over, I take my pupils away. Mr. Russell rises to open the door, a ceremony Mr. Forest, the dear man, generally

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omits. As I pass out he whispers in a tone vibrating with triumph, "A demain."

After a dreamless night, I awaken fresh and happy, ready to enjoy the pleasure awaiting me, heedless of the future.

Mr. Russell wants us to lunch on board, so it has been arranged that a boat shall leave the St. Kilda jetty at eleven o'clock.

To avoid a long detour, the children, in charge of their nurse, are to meet me on the beach. We dismiss Fanny, overjoyed at the prospect of a day's holiday, and lightheartedly we three proceed to the end of the jetty, where a motor launch is waiting for us.

The bay is as calm as a lake, and the yacht is soon reached.

Mr. Russell receives us at the gangway. As soon as we step on deck the flag of France is suddenly unfurled to the breeze, and a hidden orchestra strikes up the *Marseillaise*. I am overwhelmed and quite speechless at this reception. Our host, smilingly, gives me time to recover by saying :

"I should have liked to fire off a cannon in honour of your visit, but, as the celebrated Burgomaster said after he had enumerated ninety-nine other reasons for not doing it, "I have no cannon." "But we have some crackers," he adds, turning to the little ones,

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“and we’ll fire them off at dessert in honour of Mademoiselle Jeanne.” The steward conducts us to a state room, where we remove our wraps. Sylvia utters a cry of astonishment as I throw off my grey silk dust coat.

I could not resist the temptation to leave off my black serge dress for a day and wear in its stead one of my pretty dresses. It is only a costume of white cloth, but the cut and the discretion of the pale gold embroidery reveal the master-hand to the eyes of the child, an expert already in matters of fashion.

Is it wicked to want to appear before Allan Russell in one of the dresses of my past life, a crime to wish to leave an attractive picture in his eyes? He will go in a few days, and perhaps I shall never see him again. . . .

Our host is waiting for us at the dining room door. The table is decorated with *La France* roses.

“Your flowers,” says Allan, indicating a most perfect one placed beside my plate. This new proof of the tender thought and solicitude underlying these preparations sends a wave of hot blood to my cheeks.

The lunch is very gay. The girls are delighted with the dainties and sweets provided in their honour, and the crackers contain pretty souvenirs, which are greeted with shrieks of joy.

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"Sylvia," says Allan addressing the elder, "What shall we do now? Would you rather go to the engine room or fish?"

"Fish, fish," comes the excited reply.

"James, take charge of these little girls and give them some fishing tackle. We shall join you, kiddies, after coffee, and we'll see who has caught the most fish."

I ought, perhaps, to follow the children but . . . Mr. Russell evidently wants to talk to me, and I don't like to offend him by a ridiculous exhibition of prudery. He conducts me to a long chair under the awning, where our coffee is served. He begins abruptly :

"Please explain how it is I find you here in Melbourne among these shoddy people, in surroundings so unworthy of you?"

"You are among them yourself," I cannot refrain from retorting.

"Oh, I'm an outcast," he replies sadly, "but you What has happened? Who or what has forced you into this dependent position?"

"My position is honourable."

"Quite so, I had no intention of hurting your feelings Permit me a rather indiscreet question It's only natural I should take an interest in my old friend's niece even if I had no other reason."

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"Speak," I reply, simply.

"Well I thought you were married."

"Married."

"Yes, to Mrs. Deslandes' son, the Reverend Hector. Your uncle certainly led me to suppose that you were engaged that day I saw him at Gwylata and that was my only reason for leaving so suddenly for England."

"Well, you see the Reverend Hector didn't want me," I say flippantly, playing with the *La France* rose Allan has given me.

"What do you mean?"

"What I say. I was not thought good enough for a clergyman's wife." It is wrong of me to speak like this, but all the unchecked bitterness wells up in my heart. "I do not wish to blame Hector; he is a Saint, and like all Saints, he sacrifices himself and other people as well. He only did what his conscience dictated. Goody-goody people look askance at me as at you. In religion at least, I have left the beaten track."

"Then you are free, quite free?"

"Yes, I am free; are you?" I query, looking at him fixedly.

"Yes, a thousand times yes. Before my conscience, I am free to give what remains of my life to the woman who will have the courage to brave public opinion: to you, Jeanne,

THE BLACK PEARL.

you whom I have loved from the first moment I saw you."

"A love which has not prevented you from seeking others"; I cannot repress the retort.

"Oh! don't profane the love I bear you by speaking of those idle flirtations. I am not so culpable as you think, Jeanne. If my name has been associated with that of women I have never deliberately deceived anyone. Remember, I am a homeless man. Believe me," he resumes after a pause, "I have never betrayed a woman's trust."

"Jeanne," the slumbering passion in his eyes blazes forth, "you loved me as I loved you that night of our first meeting. Don't try to deny it. I saw it in your eyes, felt it in your trembling limbs as I clasped you in that waltz. The lightning flash of passion struck us both. Love at first sight! How I used to jeer at it as a poet's phantasy. Be sincere, Jeanne, are you not brave enough to avow your love?" His voice is supplicating, his eyes masterful. My heart will not be denied; my whole being, body, soul, spirit, rushes towards him Striving to regain composure, I murmur:

"You went away, notwithstanding"

"My departure was the greatest proof of love a man may give to a woman. I sacrificed myself to leave you in peace, in the calm

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happiness I thought awaiting you. I knew the memory of one night's passionate emotion would soon be effaced from your life."

He does not know, he must never know, how profound, how intense, is my love for him; how our souls are drawn together resistlessly, inexorably in ties woven who knows how many ages back.

His hand seeks mine, his arm encircles me, his voice murmurs loving words. . . With a brusque movement I tear myself free and retreat a few steps. I feel neither anger or indignation at his impassioned words; his love is too sincere to offend me. But free love! that life of outward pleasure and inward shame; I cannot accept it.

My sound moral training rises up against it. The honour of my father's name, the thought of Hector, whose sacrifice my shame would render worthless. . . . No, no, I cannot.

I move towards Allan.

"I love you, Allan. At this moment when our hearts are unveiled I could not, even if I wished, deny it; I love you as deeply, as ardently as you love me, but I cannot accept the life you offer. . . . Call me narrow, bourgeois, cowardly, what you will. Let us part keeping our affection pure, the ideal of love which nothing has tarnished.

THE BLACK PEARL.

Silently he grips the hand I tender, and we rejoin the children, who are too engrossed to have noticed our defection.

"I've caught two flatheads," exclaims Sylvia.

"Flatheads?" rejoins her sister contemptuously. "I've got three garfish. I'm going to put them in a glass bowl and keep them alive."

I assure her they won't live in fresh water.

"I'll put some salt in it."

The children's chatter helped to restore our composure. Allan becomes again the courteous host, the man of the world whose smile is just a trifle blasé.

He interests himself in the fishing, and has a glass bowl filled with sea water for the fish. As we are preparing to leave, Allan says, half in jest, half in earnest:

"There is time still; the yacht is well provisioned. Steam is up. Say the word, one only, and off we start for the countries you love...Japan, India, Italy"

"And the children, what are we to do with them?" I query, pretending to treat his words as a joke.

"The children? Oh, we can put them off at Queenscliff, and send them home by train. Or we'll throw them overboard."

He speaks lightly, but there is the glint of

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cold steel in his eyes, the glitter of the blue-eyed Gael. Beneath the careless exterior of the modern I have caught a glimpse of the primitive man.

"Too piratical, I'm afraid, to suit me," I rejoin, hiding my agitation under a smile. "In case you have any other murderous designs, I think it's time we went on shore. It is getting late, and Mrs. Forest will be uneasy."

Calling the girls, I bid them thank Mr. Russell for the day's pleasure.

One of the sailors takes the bowl of fish. While Sylvia and Gladys are saying good-bye to the sailors who showed them how to fish, Allan approaches, and glancing at the steward laden with a huge box, says simply:

"Your roses. He will take them to your lodgings."

Then dropping his voice, he holds out his hand to the wilted flower in my corsage. "Give me that one, will you? It is a small thing to grant, after what you have refused."

An expression of melancholy, of profound discouragement, steals across his face, and acting on an impulse stronger than my will and quicker than thought, I raise the rose to my lips before holding it out to him.

He seizes it with a low exclamation, and breathes in the kiss from the drooping petals.

.

THE BLACK PEARL.

At the boarding house, I find Bill eagerly watching for my arrival.

“A sailor brought a big box of roses for you, Miss. Has the Prince come in his magic boat to deliver the Princess?”

“Oh! Billy, the poor Prince is also a prisoner in the power of the wicked witch.”

“Quick, Miss, tell me where she hangs out, and I’ll rescue him.”

He would be as good as his word, my little Australian page, who hides a romantic soul under the speech of a larrikin.

XIX

A
“Fedora”

Take heed lest passions sway thy judgment to do aught which else free will would not admit.

MILTON (“Paradise Lost”).

I have just received a note from Allan. He wants to see me before he leaves for Adelaide, and asks if he may call.

Receive him here! In this dingy abode, this squalid room! Besides, what good would result? We have said all there is to say. So I send a stiff reply, saying that it is better he should not call, and bidding him adieu.

Will he feel the passionate kisses imprinted on the cold words? Or see the trace of the tear I cannot repress on the stereotyped words with which I conclude?

Another note from Allan. Since I will not receive him at my lodging, will I meet him elsewhere on some neutral ground. He cannot leave without seeing me. Is it not cruelty to refuse this small boon?

"I am leaving to-morrow," he writes, "so as to be in Adelaide on the 15th of June. Will you go with me this evening to the theatre? Fedora is on at the Princess. You know that Australian custom permits a lady to go with a friend unchaperoned. It will not be like a private interview; but at any rate we can spend these last hours together isolated by the crowd. Don't reply. My carriage

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will fetch you at 7.20. I shall wait for you at the door of the theatre. Of course if you prefer to have a chaperon bring whom you please; I have a box. But it really is not necessary."

"Can one refuse a glass of water to a poor prisoner, Bill."

My little page is anxiously regarding the traces of emotion on my face.

I am so utterly desolate; my feelings are so pent up that I am fain to partly confide in him. He is the only friend I have, and his sympathy is sincere at any rate. His eyes, brilliant windows of the soul imprisoned in his stunted graceless body, glow at this proof of confidence.

Whom can I ask to accompany me? Miss Steele? She would be horrified. To her the theatre is the house of Satan. Besides, I remember now, she is away, at some congress probably. Mrs. Johnson? Horror! That woman sitting between me and Allan. Absurd! Odious! Except Mrs. Forest, these are the only women I know in Melbourne.

Well I will go alone. We will share these last moments of happiness together. Tomorrow he will be gone.

At tea, which I have alone with the landlady and Billy, I tell the former that I am going to the theatre, and shall return late. Not to

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have to sit up, she gives me the key, and says that I shall find matches and a candle on the hall table. These insignificant details help me to compose myself, and presently I proceed to my room to dress. I do not want Allan to be ashamed of me. The only evening dress I have is the rose coloured frock I wore at the Hunt Club ball two years ago. I have never had it on since that night. Mrs. Clarke had insisted on my bringing it.

“Melbourne is very dressy; you are sure to be asked to some dinner or evening.”

Poor darling, she does not know how my timidity, my pride perhaps, has thrown me back on myself. Certainly Mrs. Forest, the only society woman I know, would not dream of asking her children's governess to a ball or a dinner.

Bill rushes up frantically to tell me that the carriage is waiting. I strongly suspect he intends to take a seat beside the coachman. Well, I shall be glad to know him near me, the devoted little fellow.

Allan is at the door of the theatre. He thanks me for having come, and amused by the drolleries of my funny attendant, he gives him a shilling to go to the gallery. Everybody in Melbourne society knows each other, and the apparition of a girl in a stage box with the “notorious” Mr. Russell causes a

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certain flutter. Several lorgnettes are levelled at us, but what matter? We are together. It is our last meeting, and I am jealous of every moment. Not a word, not a gesture makes me regret having come. The pallor of his face, the fire in his eyes, alone betray the repression of his feelings.

We speak little of the play. The spectacle of the woman sacrificing every thing for love's sake is too fraught with the responsive emotion of our own hearts to make any comment.

In the middle of the play, Allan leaves me, excusing himself, but assigning no reason for his absence. Alone during the entr'acte I catch sight of Mrs. Forest in the dress circle. I endeavour to meet her eye, but evidently she does not want to recognise me. It troubles me for a moment, but Allan is back, a changed man. His dejection has disappeared; his eyes are glowing, and even before the curtain falls he hurries me away.

This eager haste to curtail the few precious minutes left to us rather astonishes me. If it depended on me I should want to lengthen them out indefinitely. However, I follow Allan without a murmur to the foot of the staircase, where he leaves me for an instant to beckon the coachman. I find myself suddenly face to face with Mrs. Forest. I bow. Instead of responding, she turns her head aside, and

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with a contemptuous sneer, remarks just loud enough for me to hear,

“These creatures are insolent enough to bow to people they don’t know.”

Good Mr. Forest sends me furtively a compassionate glance, but the blow has struck home. When Allan finds me I am still trembling.

The carriage rolls along to Gipps-street. My companion is silent during the drive. His hand seeks mine, but after a close clasp I withdraw it. The encounter with Mrs. Forest has unnerved me. I shall never be able to return to this woman who has publicly insulted me. The carriage stops in front of my lodging.

All is in darkness, but I have the key.

When I try to open the door it resists my pressure. The bolt is shot back, and the chain fastened.

The Storm Breaks

“Je hais le monde lâche, hypocrite, menteur,

Qui se rit de nos pleurs, en feignant de les plaindre.

Sa vaine loi d'honneur, il me plaît de l'enfreindre.

N'ai-je point pour m'absoudre un amour immortel ?

.

Aimer d'abord, c'est le devoir essentiel.”

MARTHE DUPUY.

One or two windows of the next house are opened, and curious eyes turned upon us, but nobody stirs in the boarding house.

"Bill, Bill, open the door. It is I." No reply.

"You'll have to give it up. They won't open," says Allan. "You can't stay all night in the rain, before a closed door. Let me take you somewhere."

Almost by force he takes me back to the carriage, and giving an order to the coachman, jumps in beside me. His voice is low and caressing as he wraps the rugs around me, pulls off my wet gloves, and chafes my numbed fingers with his burning palms. But I have gone through so much, the insult, the closed door, the thought of the unknown place to which I am being taken at this late hour, that I burst into tears. Allan reproaches himself with being their cause, and murmurs that they are the last I shall ever need to shed. His voice soothes me, though a sob shakes me now and again. After some minutes, which seem interminable, the carriage turns into a drive bordered with trees, and stops before a brilliantly lit mansion. The hall door is thrown open, and Allan carries rather than

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leads me into a small room opening off the spacious hall. Drawing an easy chair to the fire crackling in the grate, he kneels to pull off my satin shoes, soiled with mud during the long wait in Gipps-street.

The soft luxury of the room, the well-trained, noiseless servants rouse my suspicions and shaking off the torpor into which fatigue and distress have plunged me, I exclaim. "Where are we? Whose house is this?"

"Mine," replies Allan, bluntly, his dark eyes ablaze in his white face.

"I don't want to deceive you; I bribed Mrs. Johnson not to open the door. I want to compel you against your will to be happy, to leave Melbourne with me."

Anger gives me strength to dominate my weakness. I rise, my body tense as a steel blade.

"So this is a trap, then?"

"True; all is fair in a love like mine."

"You are mistaken in me, Allan. I am not a woman to be carried by storm." Our eyes meet in a silent conflict of wills. His are the first to drop. Their expression changes, grows softer.

"Don't be afraid, Jeanne, you are as safe here as under your uncle's roof. My great love makes you sacred to me. But I cannot go away alone. I cannot live without you. Jeanne,

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beloved, my soul, will you not yield? You love me, I feel it. I have read it in your eyes—in that kiss you pressed on the rose. Let us go away together to some far-off spot, where no one will bother whether we are united by a formal ceremony or not.”

“You will be my wife,” he continues, his ardent voice sinking into a low, persuasive murmur; “my true mate, wife of my soul as well as the adored of my heart.”

His hands caress me. His lips seek mine. The charm and magnetism of his personality envelop me. It seems as if the passion of long bygone ages had awakened and was coursing through my burning veins. With a supreme effort of revolt, I regain mastery of myself.

“I beseech you, leave me. I appeal to your honour.”

He rises and retreats a few steps. “Ah, well, I’m ready to sacrifice the honour you invoke. I will break my promise to the woman who bears my name. I will demand a divorce. I shall probably get it. The proofs are overwhelming. She will defend the suit, other names will be dragged in; other women compromised. I shall have only a dishonoured name to offer. But what will that matter to you? You will remain impeccable—a statue whose white draperies are unstained. If your love is so poor a thing, so cold and inanimate

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that to gain it I must lose the only possession left to me—my word of honour—well, so be it. I submit. I'll start for England at once, and in a few months—money hastens these things—I shall return to offer you the legal ceremony you exact. But if you have one spark of generosity, if you really love me, Jeanne, you won't drive me to this step. You will give yourself to me unreservedly, as a woman, strong, loving and courageous, gives herself to the man of her choice."

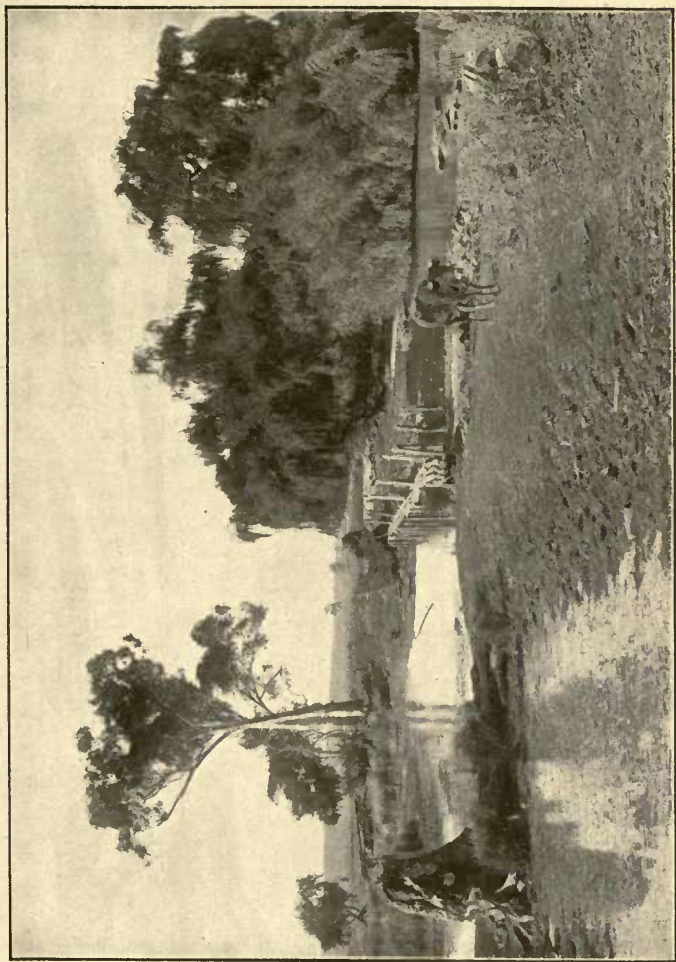
Without another word, without a look, Allan goes.

A brief order to the servant, and the clang of the hall door and the rumble of retreating wheels fall upon my ears.

A housemaid enters and shows me to a bedroom. Silently, except for the few necessary words of service, she helps me to undress and get into the huge bed, where, almost unconscious, I fall into the heavy sleep of complete exhaustion.

I am awakened next morning by the maid entering with a letter and writing materials.

"Our fate is in your hands," writes Allan. "I shall accept your decision, whatever it is, without a murmur, without even trying to influence you again by my presence. It is the only reparation I can offer you for my conduct last night. I realise this morning the indignity of my action. I ask your pardon, Jeanne. Decide, you are quite free. Shall I start at



ON THE MURRAY FLATS.

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once, get the divorce, and come back for you? Perhaps, though, you would rather join me in some spot chosen by yourself, where our union may be consecrated by all the legal formalities you deem necessary, or, dear one, shall not our love prove the great conqueror? Let us go together. Is it not the easiest solution? You could leave this afternoon for Adelaide, where I am less known than here. Rooms will be ready for you at the South Australian Hotel. In three days I shall be at Glenelg with the yacht whence we can depart without exciting any comment. Barker will attend to all your wants. She is discreet and intelligent, and will follow you on board the "Sita." I shall leave here myself this evening, a few hours after your departure; that is, if you will go, my darling. I shall see you off at the station—oh, nothing but a glimpse, my Jeanne, just to make sure that you won't turn back at the last minute. If you won't consent to follow my wishes, at the least remain here. In this house, which is yours, until the moment I am a free man, you will be quite safe. You cannot return to the woman who sold you. I shudder at the thought of another daring to do what

"Just one word, Jeanne, to learn your decision."

The silent maid hands me the tray of writing

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materials. With trembling fingers, I scrawl these words :

"I cannot fight against you and myself any longer. I will start for Adelaide as you wish."

The struggle is over. By four o'clock Barker has finished packing, and a cab takes us to the station. Allan is there, his eyes glowing with joy. He conducts me to the sleeper he has had reserved.

"My whole life will not be long enough to thank you, chérie." His voice is low and vibrating with the intoxication of a great triumph. "Three days, three days only, and we shall be united, beyond the power of anyone to separate us. By the way," he adds, "here is a young man who wants to say *au revoir*."

Billy steps forward with a huge bunch of roses, which he offers me with an uncertain look in his cunning eyes.

"Billy is coming with me. He has brought your trunks. They are all here, Billy, I suppose?"

Dropping his voice, he resumes, "He threatened to open the door when his mother fastened the chain. I could only obtain his neutrality by promising to let him go with his 'Princess.' "

Billy has evidently been telling him about our fairy tales.

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“Anyhow, I thought you would like to have the little fellow with you. He is quite devoted.”

Poor Billy! It was his devotion, then, which made him betray me. Well! since the die is cast, there is no good in saddening the heart of the unconscious little mortal. So I accept Billy's flowers, his face grows serene, and the train starts as Allan from the foot-board murmurs his last adieu, “je t'aime.”

Annie
Besant

“One soul that went out alone into
the darkness and on the other side found
Light, that struggled through storm and
on the other side found Peace.”

ANNIE BESANT.

On our arrival at Adelaide—how different from that of barely two years ago, when I was so merry, so full of youth and glowing hopes—we are driven to the hotel. Our rooms are ready and luncheon is set in the little sitting-room adjoining. Allan has anticipated everything. Will his watchful love, his tender forethought attend me always like this?

I place myself under his guidance, even as I surrender my will to his. I am borne along by the current of his desire, as a leaf is swept by the tempest.

I had grown so weary of my solitude, of the utter forlornness of my outlook. It is sweet to feel this protecting love, enveloping and watching over me even from afar.

He will be here soon, my handsome lover. in two days, three at the most. Then, forgetting everything, the world and its empty conventions, its superficial duties, we shall set forth for the land of my dreams, Ceylon, with its palms and pearls; India, with its palaces and strange temples.

After a few hours' rest, the rays of the setting sun gleaming on the sea whereon is Allan's yacht, lure me to the balcony. The heavens are ablaze as with fire. Clouds of

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reddish violet are massed against the background of gold, and the red disc of the sun is sinking rapidly into the waves. While I am seeking intently for a glimpse of the green ray of the legend, the presage of happiness—love is making me superstitious—a familiar voice, the clear sonorous tones of Dick Power falls upon my ear.

“Daisy, the baby is awake, come quickly and take her.”

My first impulse is to rush through the half-opened French window whence Dick's voice issues.

They are here, my dear Gwylata friends, and with them the little one of whose birth they wrote me some months ago, and whom they wished to name after me. But a second thought piercing my heart like an arrow, makes me recoil. How can I explain my presence at this hotel, where my rooms have been taken by Allan. How can I tell them that I am awaiting my lover, and that the luxury around me is the price of my shame. A wave of hot blood mounts to my forehead as the thought presents itself to me. This, then, is the future a forbidden love will entail! Constrained to hide from all those I have known and loved, to blush before the daughter of my uncle's employé! And will not

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some echo of my guilt reach Hector, saddening his last years of suffering, bringing remorse for having left me to the perils of life. I close the window gently, drawing the thick curtains, but the sight of the formal sitting-room, and the numerous boxes Barker has had sent from the shops in order that I may select an outfit for a long voyage, the aspect of this prim, enigmatical woman, who, under a veneer of respect conceals perhaps contempt, and who probably laughs and jests about me with the hotel servants, all revolt me.

I am stifling. I cannot breathe here. A short walk in the fresh air for a few minutes, lost in a crowd of strangers, will help me to regain composure, tranquillity.

Declining Barker's companionship, I leave the hotel and mingle with the throng streaming from the railway station opposite, and find myself in the main artery, King William-street, I remember. I force myself to note details—the straight, wide thoroughfare, suggestive, as in many new towns, of a great future, looks cheerful and animated under the electric lights. The flower and fruit shops and the brilliantly illuminated hotel bars are open to the happy-looking folk hurrying along, citizens of a free and rich country. It is the boulevard of this city of the Antipodes, a treeless boulevard true, but with wide pavements

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covered with verandahs as a shield from the ardent sun. Its temples adorn the street corners—monumental banks erected for the cult of the Golden Calf. Higher up two twin towers are detached against the dark sapphire sky. Twice I ascend and descend the street, striving to get away from my thoughts; to forget myself if only for a moment, in the interest of watching the night life of the Australian city, new to me, for I know only the tranquil evening stillness of the Bush. In Melbourne I never found courage to go out alone after daylight.

A blare of instruments from one of the cross streets! It is the Salvation Army, calling to repentant sinners. Well! I don't want to repent. Besides, the appeal is too noisy. It may touch less exacting natures. What can it offer me?

Opposite the Post Office, the Town Hall displays its illuminated facade. A big poster bears a well-known name—Annie Besant.

It is the name of the celebrated woman whose eloquence Mrs. Clarke, my dear Kate, used to extol.

Large capitals announce the title of the evening's lecture—Reincarnation.

Who knows! Perhaps it may solve the mystery of my dreams, and those haunting resemblances. I enter. The room is already full;

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only under the balcony are there some empty seats. Two young girls make room for me. I gaze round. The audience is in some respects an extraordinary one. More than 2000 people, belonging to all classes of society, are packed closely together without distinction of rank. The clock strikes eight. A young man with ascetic features and the brow of a thinker introduces the lecturer in a few words. Everything about her is white, the snowy hair, the long statuesque folds of her dress, even her flesh has the purity and transparency of alabaster. Her voice is pure, clear and resonant, filling the great hall. In simple, lucid language, she gives a brief outline of the principles of that ancient science of which she is the modern exponent, the basic unity of religions, the brotherhood of Man, the Law of Justice controlling the universe, human perfectibility built up from the germ which, descending from its Divine source, re-ascends to God, fully developed and perfected. Then confining herself to the theme of the evening, she explains the doctrine of re-incarnation, its antiquity, its philosophy, the belief in it by all the ancient nations of the earth and by modern countries of the Orient, by many of the great minds in past ages, and by poets and thinkers of later centuries. Above all, she depicts it as the only reasonable solution of the great enigmas of evil and seeming injustice.

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In concise phrases she continues :—

“Every man is a living spirit; he is part of the life of the supreme, he is the offspring of Deity. As sparks come forth from a fire, so comes he forth from the Divine Spirit. He comes to earth to learn. All are equally ignorant when plunged into human life. Ignorance is the only original sin, and it is not criminal but inevitable. As the powers of the Deity within him are unfolded he grows into the stature of the Perfect Man. Passing out of the first human life, ignorant, helpless, having committed what we should call crimes, but which were no crimes, to that new soul without knowledge to distinguish between good and evil, but were only experiences—the man passes into the intermediate world. There he learns that these things are not the best to do because they bring trouble on the other side. He takes his cravings and his passions with him; he is tormented by them until they are worn out, starved out, and then he passes on to a higher world, where everything in him of good is nourished and increased; then back to earth he comes again with the gained experience, the added knowledge to learn further lessons, every life adding some necessary experience, every re-birth bringing with it larger and wider powers, learning righteousness by the suffering that treads on the heels

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of evil, learning compassion by the sorrow which is endured under the yoke of oppression, learning all lessons by experience and transmuting them into character until perfection is reached, until the Perfect Man shines out in all the splendour of man become divine.

Then compulsory re-incarnation is over; unless the man returns as Saviour he passes on, all earth's lessons learnt, into wider life and more splendid opportunities."

How can I give an idea of the impression these vivid words leave upon me?

If I could only give back to them the sound of that voice vibrating with emotion, alternately convincing and dominating, but more than all, restore the accents of truth, of profound conviction, which distinguish the woman who believes, the Seer who knows!

Is it a mirage, the play of my imagination, or the magnetic influences of these thousands of hearts and spirits strained towards her in the tense and breathless silence of the vast hall?

Is it the involuntary effort with which my whole being rushes forth to receive the message of Faith and Hope which her marvellous voice carries to my heart, filled with dark forebodings? I am oblivious to all but that white figure, majestic, almost superhuman in its

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spiritual strength. A light seems to envelop her, radiating as in an aureole.

Yes, it is the true evangel she preaches, the Gospel of Love, taught by the Christ to his brothers, but broadened, expanded, enfolding all Humanity as it toils upward, life on life, towards its final goal.

The voice of the orator drops as she explains simply and lucidly how the contradictions of life, and the presence of evil, are consequent upon the different ages of the souls born into the world. She dwells on the widely divergent ideals of morality, which, obviously, cannot be the same for the infant souls of the criminal and the savage, and for the man of genius, the saint, and seer, those elder brothers of humanity.

The final proof of the doctrine interests me keenly—that strange memory of past existences, glimpsed by some only in intermittent flashes, but to others recalled and recognised as the links of a complete and continuous chain throughout the ages.

She cites the words of Edward Carpenter, a poet, too little known—"Every pain that I suffered in one body became a power which I wielded in the next," and those of Christ, "Be perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect."

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She points out the mockery of this mandate when applied to only one short life.

"But," she resumes, "He who spoke knew there was time enough; knew that you could grow from strength to strength; knew that divine perfection is your destiny, and urged you to step forward on the road that leads thereto.

. . . Oh, if I could tell you what it was to come out of all the struggle and misery in London, and to know that it was not hopeless, and that those miserable drunken men and women, those children of wretchedness and vice, were only babes in the beginning of their long life! . . . What joy to think that one could help them in their upward climb, quicken their progress, inspire them with hope—that one could say to the criminal, "My brother, where you are I was myself; and as for the saints above us, we shall both grow up to take our stand where they now stand in the eternal life."

"Compare this doctrine with the other two theories of life, and apply this key to the turning of the locks of human misery and human ignorance. Study, think for yourself, and you will see that it is true. . . . It will become for you what it has been to thousands of us, the chasing away of darkness, the dawn of light, the rising of the sun . . . until

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every child of man shall have grown to the fulness of the stature of the Christ.”*

The orator leaves the hall in a reverent silence which no one dares break by a single note of applause. For one moment these thousands have caught a glimpse of the ideal of perfected humanity. A great wave of emotion has encompassed them, too deep, too holy to find expression in word or movement. It is apparent in the dilated eyes, in the pallor of the transfigured faces, which, for a moment, have vibrated with the mystic tremor.

For an hour and a half the lecturer has spoken, holding her audience in the grasp of her wonderful magnetism, not a murmur, not a sound, save the impassioned voice penetrating, convincing, dominating all hearts, even if only for a moment, with the great Hope. Perhaps on the majority the impressions will be fleeting, but I am fired with the wish to learn, to know. The thirst of science is burning in my veins.

At the door some small tables are littered with books. I take those which some one, a member of the society, judging by her sympathetic smile, holds out to me.

I have spent the night reading, and this morning I am writing to her who has torn aside for me a corner of the veil.

..NOTE.—This lecture has been published in extenso in “Australian Lectures.” — G. Robertson & Co. Pty. Ltd.

XXII

Towards
the
Light

“Before thou takest thy first step,
learn to discern the real from the false,
the ever-fleeting from the everlasting.

“Voice of the Silence.”

In an interview wherein I have bared the weakness of my poor passionate nature, the great Teacher has pointed out the only road open to me, that of sacrifice and renunciation. She has made me understand that the crucial moment of my life has arrived, that from the instant I reddened with shame in the hotel I recognised the sin of my purpose. She has given me a glimpse of a great love, elevated by suffering, ennobled by abstinence, which will unite the soul of Allan with mine for all time, even though our bodies, the vesture of a day, are separated by the laws of Karma. Her eyes, unforgettable, once seen, with their changing lights like the sea, plunge into mine with a look of ineffable sweetness; eyes whose depths have fathomed the infinite, they have given me their message.

Returning to the hotel which Barker has left to obtain some further necessity for the voyage, now never to be taken, I write a note bidding her await Mr. Russell's arrival.

Then, heaping together clothes, souvenirs, family papers, trinkets, and my pearl necklace, I proceed to the house of Miss Carter, the secretary of the Theosophical Society, with

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whom I am to stay for a while. She is a woman, young still, with a profile clear cut as a cameo, frank and sympathetic in manner. What impresses me most, perhaps, is the calmness of her demeanour, a repose nothing can disturb. In the quiet home, simple yet charming, where she lives with her aged mother and a younger sister bearing a sweet French name, I shall find the haven I want, the moral aid to face this crisis as well as practical assistance to begin a new life.

Miss Carter helps me to dispose my small belongings in the pretty room, from whose windows I can catch the glint of the sea. The fresh pungency of the salt air brings vividly the remembrance of Allan. He is very near now. I must not weaken my resolution by thinking of his disappointment. All my strength will be required in the coming interview.

Am I strong enough to see him without yielding to his persuasions, to his reproaches. perhaps? Can I trust myself not to be carried away by my own love?

I must force myself to think of mundane things. The money I have will not last long, and I do not want to abuse the hospitality so generously offered.

My aunt's pearls! They must be the first sacrifice. She wouldn't blame me for selling

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them to preserve my honour and dignity. They are valuable and their proceeds will give me time to study this new science and think of what I am to do. Perhaps I could be a nurse. I cannot teach any longer. A governess must be beyond the breath of slander. Adelaide is a long way from Melbourne; still, distance is nothing in Australia. A spiteful word from Mrs. Forest, a rumour even, might reach here. The night I spent under Allan's roof, my sojourn at the hotel, might easily be interpreted to my disadvantage, and I could not explain matters to an utter stranger.

A nurse in a hospital, or in a private home, is independent. Apart from that, the work attracts me. I shall find greater outlet for my activities, for my affections, and so fill the void caused by the absence of Allan, my dear lost love.

Miss Carter utters an exclamation when I show her my necklace. She is a woman after all, this serious Theosophist, and cannot repress the admiration we women feel for beautiful pearls, which, feminine in their nature, seem to be dependent on us for their exquisite chatoyant lustre.

"What a magnificent black pearl. It should be very valuable."

"It is. But I can't sell it. It's an heirloom, and then . . ." I stop, hesitatingly.

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Miss Carter's eyes question me affectionately.

Why not confide in her? She looks kindness itself, and since she is to instruct me in the Great Teaching it would be better if she knew all my history. She will believe me when I tell her that I am guilty of imprudence only, and help me, should I be in danger of succumbing to temptation.

She listens attentively to the story of the black pearl, and is not in the least astonished at my dreams.

"The magnetism of the Begum, impregnated in it, has been sufficient to awaken in you the memory of past lives," she says.

"Do you really believe, then, that Mr. Russell may have been the Rajah? Not a word has made me suppose that he retains the least memory of such a life."

"Few people can retrace their past existences," replies Miss Carter, "but you are a little psychic, and the astral world has been opened by the influence of the Begum's jewel, added to other agencies more powerful still. We have friends in the spiritual world as in the physical," she adds, putting her hand affectionately on mine, "and no doubt they have been sent to show you this love, strong enough to persist through different personalities, so that you may purify it entirely."

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"But wouldn't it be better to destroy it ruthlessly?"

"No. Rather guard it. Love is a divine force, a spark from the sacred fire. To destroy it would be heresy, mutilation, atrophy of the soul!"

"It would be better," she continues thoughtfully, "to yield to this love which the world holds guilty than to deny it. . . . But it would be better still to ennoble it, to raise it beyond material desires, not only in you, but in the man whose life is linked to yours by so strong a chain."

"You think, then, I ought to write to Allan and see him?"

"Certainly. It would be cowardice to shirk it, and the first quality to be acquired is moral strength. Virtue is not true virtue until tested. Besides, it is his due. Souls meet, form friendships, and ties, in order to help each other through wrong-doing, and through love which has caught a glimmer of the light." Pausing a moment, she resumes, "Nothing will soften the blow to his love, to his pride as a man, so much as the sight of the suffering, the grief you share with him. Your duty is to help him, this Allan you love so devotedly, sustain him, make an appeal to his higher nature so that he will renounce you voluntarily, ennobling himself in turn by the sacrifice."

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"And this pearl," she adds, raising the detached pendant, "is it not the symbol of your present life? By the marvellous agency of powers which change evil into beauty, the grain of sand, the speck of dirt on the gleaming nacre, are transmuted into a precious gem.

In the series of lives knitted together by the soul, the life of suffering and sacrifice from which the higher self emerges, that is the black pearl of the necklace.

.
Miss Carter has just announced that Allan is in the drawing-room. He has lost no time on receipt of my note. Pausing at the door, I can hear him pacing up and down with quick, irritated steps. I send a silent prayer to the angels and archangels, or whatever may be the names of those who have us under their care, for words that shall touch him, appease his anger, and bring him to the voluntary surrender of my love.

His eyes sombre, his mouth stern, Allan greets me with a curt

"Why are you here? What has happened that you have not waited for me at the hotel?"

His voice is hard, vibrating with the anger he tries to control.

"Listen, Allen, and try to understand me."

"That is easy. A word will suffice. Are you going with me? Yes or no?"

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"Yes, if you absolutely exact it. No, if you will be generous enough to give me back my promise."

"Don't expect that. If your departure depends only on me, let us start at once"—proceeding towards the door.

"Sit down first, Allan. Grant me a few minutes. Surely it's serious enough, with all its consequences, to warrant that."

Allan regards me, amazed at my calmness, which indeed surprises myself. The mastery which he exercises over me seems for the nonce to have lost its influence. I am quite collected, and absolute mistress of myself.

He sits down, however, and I take a seat beside him.

"Allan, I swear, if after hearing me you still insist upon it, I will follow you; I will be your mistress, the slave of your desires. You may possess my body, but it will be at the expense of my soul, of my love, perhaps.

"Your love, Jeanne! What has changed it like this? For you did love me," seizing my hands in his; "I have seen it in your eyes, felt it in the trembling of your body—the body you throw at me as a victim is thrown to a ferocious beast. Have I not felt your heart throb as you lay in my arms, heard the sigh which was but the echo of my own."

The passion I thought dead is surging

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through me. My whole body is crying out for him. . . . No, no, I must fight still, for his sake, for our divine love.

"I do love you, Allan, with all the strength of my nature, body and soul, but now that I have realised the shame of this love, I cannot yield to it without debasing myself, without, more terrible still, risking the real, the eternal love which will unite us for ever, if we have the strength to keep it pure."

"Silly nonsense! The foolish imaginings of a head filled with these new doctrines. What! Quit the substance for the shadow! Forego present happiness for visionary felicity. We love each other. We are young, rich, free to go where we will! Give rein to your love, Jeanne; let mine sweep you away. Let us enjoy life. Come, sweetheart, it is so beautiful, so real. Dismiss these morbid ideas, these foolish theories. Leave this transcendent love to the woman who has perverted your imagination, who has taken possession of you only to destroy you."

I repress my irritation at the thought that Barker must have followed me on the night of our arrival. Nothing I say must add to his anger.

"On the contrary, Allan, it is that very woman who has induced me to receive you, counselled me to keep to my word, if you insist

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upon it. But, oh, my beloved ! Try to understand this love, the only real love, which is better than the vain passion of a few hours."

"I am only mortal, a man, not a spirit, whom the love of the angels can satisfy," replies Allan, a smile of bitter irony curving his lips.

"Allan, believe me, before I heard a word of the theories you term silly I blushed with shame at the thought of what I had nearly become. A chance meeting with some old friends, from whom I had to hide, lest they should recognise me, showed me the abyss at my feet. To be compelled to go through life, avoiding all who once knew me, reduced to seek the society of *declassés* like myself. . . . Allan, Allan, for our love's sake do not condemn me to such an existence. There will be no joy in it for you, my poor love; you will suffer seeing my misery."

"It's your pride, Jeanne, which won't let you forget the idea of your reputation."

"My reputation ! That's compromised as it is. If you only want the sacrifice of my honour, I will make it willingly. Must I proclaim myself in the eyes of all, your mistress ? Very well. I consent. But to have to deceive you, to feign a happiness I no longer feel ! That will kill all the good left

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in me. I shall be but a cheerless companion, my darling."

Allan regards me anxiously. His anger has melted at sight of my distress.

"Jeanne, are you quite sure you cannot throw off this morbid view of things, that my love cannot make you forget this fictitious shame?"

My strength is giving way and I fall at his feet, weeping silently.

I have failed. I am too broken to fight longer. But my weakness, my mute despair, have accomplished what my supplications could not.

After a moment's struggle with himself, Allan raises me gently, tenderly.

"Forgive me, Jeanne, for having troubled your life. I love you too well, too deeply to condemn you to an existence, which I see would be slow martyrdom. I thought my devotion would make amends for everything, and give you happiness. That is the only excuse I have to offer for my violence. I wanted to tear you away from the sad, lonely life you were leading in Melbourne. I thought my love, such as it is, would be a protection."

His hand caresses my hair lightly. A wave of tenderness passes through me.

"Rest assured, Jeanne, that if I had not thought I was acting for your happiness, as

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well as my own, I would not have taken you to my house. I would not have compromised your honour."

"What are you going to do now?" breaks in Allan, descending more quickly, as men always do, to the ordinary affairs of life.

"At least, let me have the poor consolation of knowing you independent. I will place in a bank——"

"No, Allan! Money must never be a question between us. Besides, it isn't necessary. The sale of a necklace will give me several hundred pounds, which will see me through my probationary stage."

Allan's face contracts at the mere idea.

"It is the best way, darling, to forget my grief. Don't think you are going to be the only one to suffer. But the suffering will be noble. . . ."

"Ah, well! I am going to get a divorce, you know."

"No. I don't want happiness at the price of your dishonour, any more than my own. You would feel it keenly if you broke your word. . . . Allan, I swear I will never be your's while your wife lives."

"But if she were to die. . . ." A gleam of hope kindles his sombre eyes.

"Stop!" placing my hand on his mouth to prevent further utterance. "Not another

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word! Thoughts kill sometimes as surely as a dagger. Though we may be far apart, dear, our spirits may be in touch. When sleep comes, our freed souls may unite in a love, which has nothing earthy, nothing guilty in it."

Allan shakes his head sadly. He has no faith in the life of dreams. He regards as an illusion what to me is a dear reality.

When our emotion has grown calmer, Allan says,

"And Billy, who is expecting you on board, what must I do with him?"

"Poor little Billy!" In my grief, I had quite forgotten my little page.

"You must keep him. Don't let him go back to his mother. Send him to school. I will write to tell him to obey you in everything. . . . One day, perhaps, when we are older and wiser, we may see each other again."

I cannot send him away without a gleam of hope.

"Jeanne, I am leaving you free. Before I go"—his voice becomes pleading—"will you give me one kiss, one kiss of ardent love."

Our lips meet in a long impassioned kiss of love and despair.

XXIII

The Vision

“I knew such a man (whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell : God knoweth). How that he was caught up into Paradise and heard unspeakable words.”

ST. PAUL, Cor. xii. 3-4.

Seated in an easy chair in the little white room which Miss Carter has had prepared for me, I live again the strained hours through which I have just passed—the crisis which marks a new era in my life.

In imagination I follow the wake of two vessels furrowing their way through the dark waters of the Gulf lit only by the scintillant stars. They carry away with them the two potent forces which have battled for my soul.

On the luxuriously fitted yacht, all the pleasures of the senses, the delights of material life, enchanting voyages to far-off wonder-filled lands as caprice or fancy dictate, lands where the fruits of forbidden love, envenomed, but, ah, so sweet, might have been gathered, appeasing for a time at least my passionate craving for love, for art and beauty! On board, Allan alone, sad, but resigned, thinking of me, perhaps, at this very instant, his thoughts meeting mine in love and tenderness as each moment increases the distances between us.

On the other, a huge ocean liner — fitting symbol of duty, cleaving inflexibly the narrow track, regardless of wind and wave—the white-robed, stately figure who had stood before me

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at the parting of the ways ! She, too, is being borne away to raise before other troubled souls the beacon of Hope, the desire of the Immaterial. I am conscious of an infrangible bond—a bond of the spirit—linking me with her for ever. She will sustain me in moments of weakness and despair, in the mean and sordid monotony of the days to come. Under her influence I shall see shining ever more clearly the Light of the Ideal, the star whose glimmer I can feebly descry on the sombre horizon of my future.

Half musing thus, wearied and shaken with the emotions of the preceding days, weakened by sleeplessness and fasting, for I have been unable to swallow anything but a few drops of milk, I sink into a sort of physical unconsciousness. My spirit, partly freed from its envelope of flesh, becomes suddenly sensitive to vivid and intense life. Vague, sweet harmonies float around me, luminous waves vibrate in the ambient ether. Soon they seem to condense, unite and compose a mystic scene, visible to the eyes of my spirit.

Through the quivering ether there glimmers palely, opalesquely, the interior of a cell well-known to me. Before a Crucifix the Missionary of the lepers is kneeling. I can follow the movement of his pallid lips as they frame a fervent prayer.

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The faint light clinging around him shows dimly the ravages of the dread disease. Ethereal flames issue from the Stigmata, the feet, hands and pierced side of the Saviour. They surround the young priest as with an aureole.

From the heart of the Crucified flows another radiant beam, soft, roseate, brilliant, streaming forth and rising like an immense jet of Love.

Enraptured, I gaze upon this unearthly light. Borne along by the great Force-current emanating from the God-Man I see ascend all the Disciples of the Divine Master of the Occident, martyrs, apostles, mystics filled with the Divine Madness, all the myriad throngs of Christianity.

Then I perceive around me faint flashes and turbid flames still glowing with the reeking passions of earth. They envelop Allan and me. Our two souls are linked and form but one. The flames lick and whirl around us. Brighter, more scintillant and dazzling, they ascend purified in glowing spirals. Sparks and flashes and flames group, meet, fuse, and unite in seven rays of living, pulsating Light. Sound mingles with colour in the Grand Diapason. The seven resplendent notes of the Mystic Gamut respond to the seven colours and chant sonorously the Name Ineffable. The

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whirling spiral mass of light and sound carries us upward, upward, still upward. . . .

The vibrations increase in intensity. The great columns of fire unite to form the Divine Triangle. The Mystic Seven has merged into the Three—the Trinity of Life, Love and Wisdom. The glowing, flashing, three-faceted flame irradiates the Heavens, the Worlds, the whole Universe.

Form, colour and sound commingle, and, glowing and vibrating, the Flame resolves into the Absolute, the Eternal. . . . The Three have become the One.

.
What matter now the sufferings of my life, the monotony of thankless work, the dreary waiting for a happiness which may never be realised! In a moment of ineffable ecstasy I have placed my lips to the Divine chalice. I know, O my Allan, that one day we shall be united in the bosom of the God of Wisdom, of Beauty, and of Love.

THE END.

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